"WRITING" HOME: GRACE AGUILAR AND THE JEWS

By

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

When I was eight years old I threw a temper tantrum in the B. Dalton bookstore in Town Center Mall in Boca Raton, Florida. Standing at the register, I stomped my feet wildly and demanded my parents buy a blue, leather-bound copy of Johanna Spyri's *Heidi*. Even though I no doubt embarrassed my mom and dad as I shrieked, they nevertheless bought the book (I still have it) and have fostered my love of reading and learning ever since. Words cannot express the degree to which my family's love and support have seen me through many harrowing years of graduate school, shrieking, and foot-stomping. None of my success would have been possible without continued encouragement from my parents, Denise and Steve Klass, my sister Niki, and my grandparents, Jackie and Irv Greenspan.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Page

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS. iii

ABSTRACT vii

INTRODUCTION. 1

CHAPTER

1 TOLERATION OR REPRESSION?: JEWS, JUDAISM AND THE SEARCH FOR HOME. 4

What's A Home Got To Do With It? 6
"Writing" Home. 21
Notes. 41

2 THE POWER OF THE NOVEL: RE-FORMING PUBLIC OPINION AND COUNTERING CONVERSIONIST CARICATURES. 47

The Safest and Wisest Path for Female Writers 67
Influencing But Not Interfering: Sympathy Through Subversion In The Novel 78
Notes 100

3 LIFTING THE VEIL: RECLAIMING AND RE-PRESENTING JEWISH HISTORY. 109

"Now History unfolds her ample page" 113
"In His hand is my heart, and my hope" 135
The Bad Converted. 159
Notes 171

4 CRIPPLING PAST, LIBERATING FUTURE: ANGLO-JUDAISM AT HOME. 177

A "Jewish Protestant" in Their Midst? 180

"Being Home" 203
Notes. 225

CONCLUSION: ISRAEL DEFENDED 230

Notes. 232

WORKS CITED. 233

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH 244

Abstract of Dissertation Presented to the Graduate School
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Nineteenth century England developed the philo-Semitic commitment to convert Jews that had begun centuries before with the Whitehall Conference and Oliver Cromwell's readmission of the Jews to England in 1655. This commitment included the zealous evangelical and missionary effort to write and distribute novels, sermons, stories for the young, memoirs, and histories devoted to narrating and further promoting the successful conversion of Jews. Grace Aguilar, however, was one of the first Anglo-Jewish women writers who educated readers in Jewish history, attempting to counteract philo-Semitic persuasions and foster sympathy for Jews in Christian society. Even though she was lauded as a good will ambassador for Jews in the Victorian age and rose to great popularity, Aguilar has nevertheless fallen into relative obscurity in the last 150 years. Yet her fiction and the history it conveys play a significant role in the foundation of Victorian literature and culture. Her literary

repertoire marries the world of the novel to the world of moral and religious education. I explore how this union produces a kind of fiction that works toward solving the problem of Anglo-Jewish "homelessness"—physical, emotional, and spiritual—in both the private and public spheres where the English had made it difficult for Jews to settle a home for themselves in the face of conversion. The novel, I argue, becomes a powerful and subversive tool in Aguilar's attempt to reconcile the disparate worlds of philo-Semites working toward converting Jews and Jews working toward integration; the novel provides the basis from which a religious space, or home, begins to take shape for Jews in Victorian England. How could Jews maintain their identity as Jews and yet thrive as contributing members of society without the lingering threat of philo-Semitic persuasions? Aguilar, I contend, uses fiction both to penetrate and to meld the private world of Judaism and the public world of Victorian society in hopes of establishing an answer and thus a viable Jewish home.

I stood ALONE 'mid thronging crowds who filled that stranger shrine,
For there were none who kept that faith I hold so dearly mine:
And exile felt I, in that house, from Israel's native sod,—
And exile yearning for my *home*,—yet loved still by my God. . . .

And like an oak thou standest, of leaves and branches shorn;
And we are the withered leaves by autumn tempests torn
From parent stems, and scattered wide o'er hill, and vale, and sea,
And known as Judah's ingrate race wherever we may be.

Oh! blessed was that visioned light that flashed before mine eye;
But, oh, the quick awakening check'd my soul's ecstatic sigh!
Yet still, still wilt thou rise again, my beautiful, my home,
Our God will bring thy children back, ne'er, ne'er again to roam!

—Grace Aguilar, "A Vision of Jerusalem" (1844)

Oh England! thou hast call'd us to thy breast,
And done to orphans all a mother's part,
And given them peace, and liberty, and rest,
And healing pour'd into the homeless heart;
Then, oh once more, let Israel mercy claim,
And suff'ring thousands bless our England's honour'd name. . . .

—Grace Aguilar, "The Hebrew's Appeal" (1844)

INTRODUCTION

> We should not be content with mere amalgamation with the Gentiles in society; but, without relinquishing the social position which an age of superior civilisation and refinement has assigned us, we should still retain our nationality—still, before man and before God, remain Israelites indeed; and thus compel respect towards our faith, and remove not only prejudices excited by ignorance, but check the zealous efforts of conversionists by convincing them, that our constancy, as our religion, must be indeed of God, and therefore no effort of man can turn us from it.
>
> —Grace Aguilar, *The Women of Israel* (1845)

On February 25, 1837, Anglo-Jewish author Grace Aguilar wrote her evening's prayer in her journal, what would later become her posthumously published *Sacred Communings*. As she often did, Aguilar prayed for guidance and strength against conversionist efforts, as well as for the ability to employ her "talents" as a writer to help others do the same: "Oh, Almighty, Thou hast given me one talent, not bestowed on all Thy creatures. . . . Blessed Lord, permit me, in Thy mercy, by that talent to do some little good to my fellow creatures" (209). In her 1851 *Pilgrimages to English Shrines*, "The Grave of Grace Aguilar," Anna Maria Hall observed that "Aguilar prayed fervently to God that she might be enabled to do something to elevate the character of her people in the eyes of the Christian world and—what was, and is, even more important—in their own esteem" as Jews; for "[t]hey had, she thought, been too long satisfied to go on as they had gone during the days of their tribulation and persecution" (455).

In the following chapters I define how nineteenth century conversionists used the novel to mis-educate a nation about Jews; and, how the Jewish author Grace Aguilar used fiction to counter those representations to realize her vision for an Anglo-Jewish home in England. In Chapter 1 I establish the historical and contemporary religious environment from which Aguilar emerged and would eventually try to change. I conceptualize Aguilar's vision for a Jewish home within the context of feminist perspectives of home in relationship to identity and otherness. In Chapter 2 I argue that Aguilar appropriates the subversive literary tactics of Enlightenment Feminist and late Romantic writers to outline this vision of home and to effect individual and as well as national change for Jews and Judaism. Fiction was the essential tool in Aguilar's project and aided her determination to reshape Christian ideological misconceptions, past and present, of "the Jew." For it was through the black and white words printed on the pages of her stories that Aguilar attempted not only to re-write the stereotyped Jew of the past, but it was the means by which she could reach readers, specifically Christians, as a Jewish woman writer trying to evoke sympathy for and acceptance of Jews as Jews in England. Chapter 3 explores how Aguilar re-claims Sephardic Jewish history from conversionist "fictions" in her historical romances; and in Chapter 4 I define how Aguilar's domestic narratives translate that history, particularly the secrecy of medieval crypto-Judaism, into a model for an open but private Anglo-Judaism—the development of "home" as Aguilar envisions it—in nineteenth century England. I also examine how

Aguilar's reflections in her private journals reinforce the arguments she embeds in her stories and further counter criticisms suggesting she was "anti-Jewish" or a "Christianized Jew." In exploring Grace Aguilar's "one talent" my dissertation seeks to unveil the more than "little good" she worked to inspire in her "fellow creatures" on behalf of Jews, Judaism, and the Anglo-Jewish home, as well as the British national home, until her untimely death on 16 September 1847.

CHAPTER ONE
TOLERANCE OR REPRESSION?: JEWS, JUDAISM, AND THE SEARCH FOR HOME

> [E]ver since the destruction of their kingdom . . . [Jews] have been without a fix'd abode, and have been scattered all over the earth, neglecting the Lord their God—and I believe there is not a kingdom in the known world but there are Jews to be found in it; "*yet among those Nations shall they find no ease*" and truly may it be said that their "*feet find no rest*," for every where these unfortunate people are derided, insulted and abused. Even to England, if we confine ourselves alone, a country professing the greatest humanity to strangers and foreigners—we see them wandering about the streets . . . the objects of ridicule and contempt . . . —nay, so much are they held in derision in this Christian Country, that even children despise them and *laugh them to scorn*.
>
> —Henry Francis Offley, (1795)[1]

> . . . . 'Here, where the exiles of Israel for centuries have found a peaceful home, will we rest, my Josephine, filling the little hearts of our children with thanksgiving, that there is one spot of earth where the wandering and the persecuted may repose in peace.'
>
> . . . . 'the love we bear our country is so strong, so deep that the thought of death, is less bitter than the dream of other homes. We stand alone in our peculiar and most sainted creed, alone in our law, alone in our lives on earth, in our hopes for heaven. Our doom is to wander accursed and houseless over the broad earth, exposed to all the misery which man may inflict, without the power to retaliate or shun. Surely, O surely then, the home that is granted us must be doubly dear—so sheltered from outward ill, so blessed with inward peace, that it might seem we alone were the inhabitants of Spain. O! . . . it is the consciousness of safety, of peace, of joy, which this vale enshrines, while around us seemeth strife and gloom. Dearest Imiri, is it marvel that I love it thus?'
>
> —Grace Aguilar, "The Edict—A Tale of 1492" (1840)[2]

In the spring of 2002 I participated in a graduate seminar titled "British Romanticism and Judaism" and was somewhat surprised to see that the majority of

writers on the syllabus were not Jewish: Wordsworth, Coleridge, Byron, Scott, Hazlitt, Lamb, Cumberland, and Edgeworth among others were listed. Influenced by Shakespeare's Shylock in *The Merchant of Venice* as well as by a long history of prejudice against Jews, these writers often promoted, sometimes consciously and sometimes not, negative Jewish stereotypes and the religious conversion of Jews to Anglo-Christianity. Though the course was a subject I knew little about at the time, I quickly became intrigued with the way these eighteenth and early-nineteenth century authors used fiction as a tool in the various facets of religious "education": in the hope of securing eventual conversion to Christianity, in building religious as well as national pride, and often in fostering anti-Semitism—even when they did not mean to do so.[3] Spearheading such "education," conversionists also overwhelmed the presses with texts in numerous genres. The most prolific contributors, however, were converted Jews themselves. Titles like *The Converted Jewess: A Memoir of Maria*; *Judaism Excelled: Or the Tale of a Conversion from Judaism to Christianity*; and "The Jews At Damascus: A Mystery Hitherto Concealed, And Now Published For the First Time, Concerning The Hebrews, The Blood That They Take From Christians, And The Use That They Make Of It, With Proofs From the Holy Scriptures" suggest the kinds of tales that flooded nineteenth century England in the name of saving the Jews.[4] From the conversionists' point of view, the novel, in its various forms, was a persuasive tool in the successful "education" of the larger Christian society so readers could also partake in the project of Jewish conversion.[5]

Many Christian authors depicted Jews in the manner they felt would best hasten their conversion; the representation of Jewish life and experience was often skewed and revised intentionally, if not entirely fabricated, in the process. I became interested in how conversionist narratives contributed to a kind of Anglo-Jewish homelessness in nineteenth century England by rejecting Jews' identity as Jews. Anglo-Jews struggled to put down roots and maintain their Jewish identity. At the same time, however, they also wanted acceptance from a society that did not want to integrate them as Jews. As a result, Anglo-Jews' desire for social and cultural acceptance during this time often resulted in the sacrifice of their Jewish identity, whether through conversion to Christianity or a less formal willingness to be absorbed into the Christian culture at the expense of Jewish identification. Though the authors we read in "British Romanticism and Judaism" all touched on these issues in different ways, the scarcity of Jewish writers on the syllabus—Judith Montefiore, Hyman Hurwitz and Grace Aguilar were the only three—suggested that issues concerning Jews and Judaism in the eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries in England had as much to do with Christianity as they did Judaism itself.

What's A Home Got To Do With It?

Just as religion can mark individual and group identity, it can also mark Otherness. In addition to what defines Otherness (religion, gender, sexuality, race), place—where a person calls home—can also define identity. In "Feminist Politics: What's Home Got To Do With It," Biddy Martin and Chandra Mohanty explain

that the "relationship between the loss of community and the loss of self is crucial. To the extent that identity is collapsed with home and community . . . the giving up of home will necessarily mean the giving up of self and vice versa" (307). When Ferdinand and Isabella decreed that Jews either convert to Catholicism or be expelled from Spain in the 1492 Edict of Expulsion, Jews were stripped of their identity and their homes—the physical house itself, spiritual identity, as well as communal and national identity as Spanish Jews. Oliver Cromwell might have unofficially readmitted Jews to England after the Whitehall Conference[6] in 1655, but they still had difficulty securing a home for themselves, and thus a sustained identity as Jews, because evangelicals and missionaries continually pressured them to convert and become absorbed into the British, Christian-centric, system. These two examples suggest that throughout history Jews have had difficulty safely and confidently claiming a place to call home as long as they identified as Jews.[7] Invoking Martin and Mohanty's conception of the relationship between identity and home,[8] I argue that nineteenth century England's desire for Jews to convert to Christianity further challenged Jewish identity and their sense of belonging—both for the Jewish individual and the larger Jewish community.

Because identity itself is a kind of home, as Laura Levitt suggests in *Jews and Feminism: The Ambivalent Search for Home*, "location matters" (3). Feminist critics like Levitt, Biddy Martin, Chandra Mohanty and Caren Kaplan have all investigated this connection between identity and home (domestic, communal, national) as it

relates to the Other. Their theoretical models provide an important foundation for understanding the Jewish Other's position in nineteenth century England. Kaplan argues that "location is a crucial metaphor in . . . [the] consideration of identity" (362) in her "Deterritorialization: The Rewriting of Home and Exile in Western Feminist Discourse." Our desire to be and feel "at home," suggests Kaplan, is directly tied to "who and what" make that home—and feelings of security and contentment—possible (363). "Identity" and "home" become problematic, explain Martin and Mohanty, when the Other does not "fit" within the confines of the socially acceptable constructs the dominant culture has put in place. The Other desires to move away from "the edge," from the margins of society, and penetrate that dominant social construct, that "narrow circle called home" (298). But how do we define that "narrow circle" and how does the Other, in this case nineteenth century Anglo-Jews, penetrate and expand that society, in the face of conversionist championing of religious homogeneity? Even more so, how do Jews find their way into society as Jews when the most direct way was through conversion and religious assimilation into British culture? What resulted for Jews during the nineteenth century was what Martin and Mohanty call a "tension" between "being home and not being home." "'Being home' refers to the place one lives within familiar, safe, protected boundaries; 'not being home' is a matter of realizing that home [is] an illusion of coherence and safety based on the exclusion of specific histories of oppression and resistance, the repression of difference even within oneself" (296-

297). British Jews were "home" and "not home" in that while the privacy of their homes afforded them some level of safety and security, they were functioning under an "illusion" because they were often pressured to repress the Jewish part of themselves (the difference), or abandon it all together, if they were to mingle freely with, and within, Christian society.

While having converted might have eased social tension and pressure, many Anglo-Jews could not identify themselves as wholly Christian or Jewish; they were something in-between. Collective memory of medieval Spanish and Portuguese persecution and the historical practice of crypto-Judaism (also derogatorily known as Marranism[9]), further contributed to the confusion nineteenth century Jews living in England suffered as a result of not being entirely familiar with their cultural and religious background. Though it dates back much earlier, crypto-Judaism, the secret practice of Judaism while publicly conveying oneself as a Catholic,[10] became a necessary alternative for Jews suffering forced conversion and baptism under the persecution brought on by the reconquista of the Iberian peninsula. However, crypto-Jewish practice often led to the abandonment of the heritage, or included dramatic altering of Jewish practice itself because of the threat of persecution if the secret was discovered; Jewish culture and rituals eventually became distorted.[11] In *Radical Assimilation in English Jewish History, 1656-1945*, Todd Endelman explains that while there were Sephardim who were steadfast in their allegiance to Judaism as they entered England in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, there were far

more "whose attachment to Jewish practice and belief was weak and confused because they or their immediate ancestors had lived as Catholics, not as Jews, for much of their lives. . . . [T]he Judaism [crypto-Jews] observed atrophied from generation to generation, as inquisitorial scrutiny made it increasingly difficult to transmit a knowledge of Hebrew, liturgical practices, and ritual observances"(23). Even those secret Jews with minimal knowledge of their heritage, observes Yosef Yerushalmi in *The Re-Education of the Marranos*, had little more than "a pastiche of fragments inherited from parents, gleaned haphazardly from books, disorganized, with significant gaps, sometimes distorted" (7). Thus, as Levitt, Kaplan, Martin and Mohanty have all argued, when the very thing that defines identity—religion, race, gender, sexuality—marks a group or individual as Other and becomes the object of persecution, "home," and the identity associated with it, is difficult to secure.

Direct descendants of Iberian crypto-Jews—and descendants of a climate of exile, persecution, torture, forced conversions and baptisms—the Sephardic community that began arriving in England after 1655[12] questioned their identity; they "moved uneasily between the Jewish and Christian communities" and were "unable to settle comfortably into either world." They were "confused, vacillating, hesitant" (Endelman 24). Not only were they historically stripped of their actual homes when forced into exile, but they were also stripped of their identity as Jews and thus left with a sense of physical and religious homelessness. The redevelopment of Jewish identity, of course, was little helped by an English society that was "not

willing to endorse the perpetuation of a separate Jewish culture or to see any value in the customs or beliefs of the Jewish religion" (Endelman 209). Because they desired a sense of home, of rootedness, many nineteenth century British Jews were ripe for assimilation; they wanted to "fit in" even if it meant living an "illusion" ("not being home") and repressing or entirely abandoning their Jewishness in the process.

Though England viewed itself as a tolerant and liberal nation, particularly in opposition to other nations' violent resistance of and action against Jews—Spain's Inquisition and Germany's 1819 Hep Hep riots, for example—it was a tolerance grounded in what Michael Ragussis has called "secret Anti-Semitism." That is, the "enlightened and conscientious English" (296) harbored an unconscious prejudice against Jews that played out in their "centuries-old tradition of philo-Semitism" (292). Ragussis explains that because the English were profoundly invested in their "reputation" for religious tolerance and liberty "the issue of intolerance toward the Jews [became] a vital concern to conceptions of English national identity" (298). Anti-Jewish behavior was "viewed as a challenge" to that identity. At the same time, however, "the Judiazation of England was a perennial fear" that "infected" every sphere of English life throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Thus, even though Jews were moving toward greater social acceptance in their fight for emancipation, religious homogeneity was nevertheless essential to the nineteenth century British estimation of strength, unity, and survival; there was, in reality, little room for toleration of the Jewish Other.[13] As history reveals, the desire for racial

and religious uniformity has been the foundation for, as well as the attempted destruction of, countless social and cultural systems. Nineteenth century England was no exception. Missionaries did not view their philo-Semitic practices as harmful or oppressive, however.[14] Rather, they prided themselves on the humanity with which they secured conversion when compared to the heinous methods used by Ferdinand and Isabella during the Spanish Inquisition.

In *Figures of Conversion* Ragussis explains that the Inquisition was "used as an excuse to reinvent the Christian mission to the Jews. Claiming that an institution like the Inquisition was the reason behind Catholicism's failure to win Jewish converts, conversionists were inspired to initiate a new era of conversion under the banner of English Protestantism, making England 'the heaven of the Jews'" (129). Thus, nineteenth century England reaffirmed, with fervent passion, the philo-Semitic practices born in the seventeenth century. As a result, explains Endelman in *The Jews of Georgian England*, many English philo-Semites adopted a "conversionist strategy based on showing compassion to the Jews [that] was linked with . . . the older doctrine that had damned Jews for all eternity" (62). The basic assumption, then, resided in the idea that the more thoroughly absorbed the Jews became in English society, and the more "sympathy" and tolerance showered on them, the nearer they would come to embracing conversion and Christianity. Philo-Semitism was misleading because it did not necessarily mean "love of Jews." Rather, explains Michael Galchinsky in *The Origin of the Modern Jewish Woman Writer*, philo-

Semitism "meant using love as a political strategy to persuade Jews to convert. The end goal was the same as . . . the Holy Office during the Inquisition: Jews' conversion" (34). England valorized itself against Spain's barbarism and was convinced a "gentler" kind of persuasion would be successful in showing Jews the way towards Christianity. Ultimately, England used Spanish history to "establish the category of race as an insuperable barrier between different peoples and to define national identity on the basis of racial and religious homogeneity" (Ragussis 130).

Take for example the writings of one mid-eighteenth century pamphleteer: "We must particularly wish and labour to effect the Conversion to our Faith of All . . . most especially the *Jews*. . . . This can only be done by kind and gentle, by friendly and brotherly Treatment; not by calling-down Fire from Heaven, or rather calling-up Fire from Hell, upon them" (qtd in Felsenstein 92). Jewishness still had to be eradicated, writes Galchinsky, "but now the individual person hidden in the Jew was supposed to be "reclaimed" with self-respect and dignity in tact. Philo-Semites can thus be distinguished from other kinds of conversionists by their belief in and use of persuasive carrots rather than coercive sticks" (34). But as Frank Felsenstein notes in *Anti-Semitic Stereotypes*, the philo-Semite was "no less [a] purveyor of traditional anti-Semitism" because more subtle and sympathetic. On the contrary, "the theological philo-Semite [sought] to undermine the very existence of Jews as Jews" (11).

In fact, it was with the establishment of the London Missionary Society (1795), the Religious Tract Society (1799), the British and Foreign Bible Society (1804), the London Society for Promoting Christianity Amongst the Jews (1809), the Philo-Judean Society (1826), and the British Society for Propagating the Gospel Amongst the Jews (1842) that England's long nineteenth century (1780-1924)[15] saw the stimulation and further strengthening of a thriving philo-Semitic commitment to convert Jews that had begun centuries before with the Whitehall Conference and Oliver Cromwell's unofficial readmission of the Jews to England.[16] At the same time, these societies also began their zealous writing and distribution of novels, sermons, stories for the young, memoirs, and histories that, as Ragussis explains, "took as their goal the narration of the conversion of a Jew" (27). These texts "occupie[d] a central place in the general conversionist ideology of English Protestant culture" (32). As a result, much of what the British public knew and continued to learn about Jews came from a "historiography of the Jews [that] was being designed to facilitate and hasten their conversion" (28). Authors wanted to "awaken the public's sympathies and thereby interest the pubic in the project of conversion" (28). The English philo-Semitic agenda was far from hidden. On the contrary, they had "rarely been anything other than frank in conjoining their desire . . . . For them, the process by which a Jew will come to recognize and acknowledge the messianic role of Christ may be greatly assisted by suitable counsel and gentle persuasion rather than by compulsion or trickery" (Felsenstein 91).

In 1831 William Hazlitt vividly captured the even more explicit consequences of anti-Jewish sentiments in his essay "Emancipation of the Jews":

> [H]unted every moment from place to place . . . [Jews] could count nothing their own but what they could carry with them. . . . they were not allowed to possess a foot of land. You tear people up by the roots and trample on them like noxious weeds, and then make an outcry that they do not take root in the soil like wholesome plants. You drive them like a pest from city to city, from kingdom to kingdom, and then call them vagabonds and aliens. When reason fails, the Christian religion is, as usual, called in aid of persecution. (321)

Hazlitt's essay reinforces the position of "the Jews" as the ostracized and homeless Other during a time when essays about Jews were more concerned with their conversion and further absorption as Christians into British society than their defense: "It is true, we no longer burn them at a stake, or plunder them of their goods: why then continue to insult and fix idle stigma on them?" (320). Images of home pervade Hazlitt's essay and suggest that a pro-Jewish argument must include the concept of home as well as the integration of Jews as Jews within the larger society. He acknowledges that "[t]he restoration of the Jews to their own country, however firmly believed in as an article of faith, has been delayed eighteen hundred years, and may be delayed eighteen hundred more" (322). Hazlitt argues that such a (possible) delay is no reason to keep them from settling themselves and participating as a Jewish community within the British nation. He mocks and questions Christian fear of the idea that Jews, if having amassed fortune and acquired land and a home, "would be more likely . . . to promote a revolution, so as to cause a general bankruptcy; or to encourage the mob to pull down his house, or root up his

favourite walks, because after all, at the end of several centuries, he and his nation indulge in the prospect of returning to their own country" (322). Such false notions are a product of the Christian "bedrid imagination of prejudice" that, he argues, "sees some dreadful catastrophe in every improvement, and no longer feeling the ground of custom under its feet, fancies itself on an abyss of ruin and lawless change" (321).[17]

Hazlitt spoke of and to the real sense of fear that the general public had regarding the "Judaization of England." This fear, during the early part of the century, is exemplified in a series of "Letters to the Editor" in *The Monthly Mirror*, June 1805–April 1806. Debating the "status of the Jews," N.S., who hides his bias for conversion and religious uniformity under philo-Semitic toleration, and S.B., who overtly expresses his desire for religious homogeneity as well as his fear of "innovation" if Jews are permitted to integrate, depict a range of public sentiment toward Jews in England at the time. In November 1805, twenty-five years before Hazlitt will do so in his essay, N.S. observes that

> Jews have been distinguished in every age and every country. . . . [T]he conduct of all ranks of society towards them, is fully adequate to produce the same effect as arose in earlier ages, from more violent proceedings. . . . [T]he rights of individuals are now more respected, but there has been no visible alteration in disposition or character; bigotry is not so brutal, so lawless as it was . . . but it still wears that forbidding aspect, which checks the growth of harmony. (374-375)

Though he boasts that "there is . . . no country in which the principles of general equity are better understood . . . or . . . more perfect, than in England" (375), N.S.

nevertheless makes clear that the violent prejudices that led to the persecution of the Jews throughout history continue to thrive in England and

> form a dead barrier between [Jews] and society. . . . It must be owned that we have not admitted the Jews to that freedom of social intercourse, without which manners cannot soften or refine; we have been too apt to consider them as incapable or undeserving of benevolent attachment. . . . The prevailing character of the Jews may be the ostensible and a very colourable pretext for the conduct so universally observed towards them; but even granting that we are actuated by no prejudices, it is surely ungenerous and unjust in us to punish dispositions to which the harsh proceedings of our ancestors gave birth. (375-376)

Even though N.S. appears to defend the Jews in much the same way Hazlitt does, his "defense" in this first letter subtly promotes philo-Semitism. When N.S. says that Jews' "manners" will not "soften or refine" until they are "free" to interact socially without the threat of persecution, he essentially outlines, albeit briefly, the very basic premise of philo-Semitism: embracing Jews in the name of sympathy and toleration in order to prime them for conversion. N.S. goes on to write: "we have still to divest ourselves of narrow prejudices, and to learn that generosity of conduct, which in encouraging confidence, will inspire affection" (375). The English must rid themselves of overt lingering prejudices against the Jews and embrace toleration so Jewish "confidence" and "affection" are encouraged. If Christians portray themselves as a tolerant nation and place generosity and compassion over prejudice and persecution then Jews might see that Christians themselves are not so bad, their "manner" might "soften" and they will be inspired with "affection" toward Christianity. While N.S. does not directly admit to the philo-Semitic nature of his

argument, the undertone of such sentiments is certainly present and comes to fruition, as we will see, in the last of his letters.

In response to N.S., S.B.'s February 1806 letter expresses much more dramatically the fear the British Christian nation harbored regarding Jewish integration. S.B. writes of his concern that "humanity" and "every principle of social order" may be "destroyed" by the Jews; he has "no hesitation . . . that such would be the consequence of that general incorporation of Christians with Jews" (86). S.B. admits that he has

> an insurmountable prepossession (let it be termed a prejudice) in favour of that pure and holy religion, in the principles of which I have been educated. . . . Without being a bigot . . . without being an advocate for the persecution of those who differ from me in sentiment,—I am still jealous of any innovation which is evidently calculated to injure the very foundation of so admirable a fabric. Such, Sir, I term the admission of the Hebrew people into that freedom of social intercourse—that assimilation of affection—that sympathy of feeling—that reciprocity of interests—to which we are called to invite them. . . . [the writer] (perhaps has not reflected) upon the consequences of a collision of such heterogenous principles. (86-87)

"Innovation" is interesting here. Generally innovation is associated with newness, positive development, and creativity. In 1806 "innovation" meant "change, revolution, rebellion, alteration of what is established."[18] The nineteenth century viewed the "alteration of what is established" as a kind of "revolution" and "rebellion" that was "calculated to injure." But "injure" what? For S.B. "the Jew" remained that stereotyped mythic figure who was evil, calculating, divisive, greedy, and capable of corrupting the very fabric of not only Christian society, but of humanity. S.B.'s fears of "innovation," of "the Jew" disrupting and further injuring

"the very foundation" of Christian society (of the English nation), as N.S. passionately discusses in his April 1806 response, are founded on little more than his own prejudices and misguided notions about Jews. As he quickly reveals, however, N.S. is not entirely free from those fears himself. While he criticizes S.B. for cowardly hiding his prejudice behind "innovation," N.S. shows himself to be just as, if not more so, cowardly by hiding his own prejudices behind a philo-Semitic mask. By wooing Jews to their "final conversion" in this way, N.S.'s approach ironically represents the "calculating" kind of attitude S.B. fears will cause the ultimate "destruction of humanity":

> The direct charge brought against [Jews] is, that they are "calculated to injure the very foundation" of Christianity. . . . I never could have expected that the desire of promoting "that generosity of conduct, which, in encouraging confidence, will inspire affection," would be accused as an innovation upon Christianity. Innovation is one of the worst . . . terms of the present day; it is a fence behind which every custom, however pernicious, every prejudice, however baneful, every opinion, however erroneous, may skulk in safety. . . . If innovation be a crime, Christians . . . must be notorious criminals. . . . there must be gradations of improvement on both sides before Christians and Jews blend promiscuously together; long-existing prejudices and habits must be conquered by degrees; it is incumbent on Christians, as the most powerful and the most enlightened, to lead the way, and the probable effects of their generous proceedings may be a change in the character of the Jews, and their final conversion to [the Christian] religion. (230-233)

This exchange between N.S. and S.B. in the early-nineteenth century is significant because it reinforces the idea that though ostensibly tolerant, Britons feared the possible "innovation" of, or dramatic change in, their homogeneous Protestant society. And, as the comments in his last letter particularly display, N.S., even in his push for "toleration of the Jews," clearly upholds and promotes philo-Semitic

ideology when he expresses his hope for the Jews' "final conversion." Though S.B.'s letter more overtly details the prevalent prejudices against Jews,[19] N.S.'s desire for conversion, masked by sympathy, represents a philo-Semitic mindset, as well as the "considerable level of suppression . . . and control over beliefs, dispositions, and expressions" (Canuel 1) that affected late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth century Jews.

What resulted from such tactics was a society, a social space, nearly impossible for the religious Other to penetrate. But, as Judith Page explains in *Imperfect Sympathies*, "of all the racial, religious, or ethnic Others . . . Jews occupy a unique position because they were particularly difficult to pin down: they were mostly poor but they were also rich, they were foreign-looking but they also simulated British gentility, they spoke English but not always the King's English. Jews were difficult to categorize and to place within certain boundaries, unlike distant, colonized Others. . . . Jews made the process more difficult because they were outcasts who were making inroads into the culture" (3-4). Grace Aguilar was at the forefront clearing the path for Jews, Judaism and acceptance in the face of rigid racial and religious hierarchies. As one of the first visible Jewish female authors of her time, Aguilar attempted to penetrate Christian fear and the steadfast religious homogeneity *The Monthly Mirror's* letters exemplify by fostering sympathy for Jews as Jews in Christian society, and educating readers in Jewish history through her "one talent," her writing: "It is to remove this ignorance concerning us, which even

now must exist where no Jews are known, that is one of my principal aims in writing and I am truly thankful to say, that in more than one instance—I have been enabled to remove prejudice and create love" (Aguilar 103).[20]

"Writing" Home

> Could Christians once properly understand the pure spirit of the Mosaic faith, the real intent of all its ceremonies, the immortal hopes, the universal benevolence it breathes, the strength it infuses, the comfort it bestows: they would perhaps see how perfectly unnecessary it is, either for the Hebrew's happiness in heaven or his spiritual welfare upon earth, to make him a convert to their faith. (12)

Thus begins Grace Aguilar's first published work, *The Spirit of Judaism*.[21] Barely twenty when she began writing *Spirit*, Aguilar was responding to a tradition of prejudice and conversion that was ingrained in Christian social consciousness. Aguilar recognized the inextricable link between the identity of the Jewish Other (individual as well as national), home (domestic as well as national), and narrative long before such issues came to occupy a more central position in twentieth century feminist critical discussions. For Aguilar, gender, conversion, narrative, and identity have everything to do with "Home." Jews, she declares in *The Jewish Faith*, are "the persecuted of a world and, as such, tossed amongst and mingled with the nations, scarcely able to recognize themselves as the same people who were the chosen of the Past, and regarded by every other faith as a race abandoned and utterly cast off" (54). As members of a diaspora that was "scarcely able to recognize themselves," "abandoned and utterly cast off," Jews and their relationship to home—or Jewish inability to establish an identity when for centuries there was no stable home—is the

central point of investigation and source of motivation for Aguilar's narrative project.

Born 2 June 1816 in Hackney, Grace Aguilar (see Figure 1) was a Sephardic Jew whose crypto-Jewish ancestors fled the Spanish Inquisition, eventually settling in England where they carefully maintained their heritage. It was a heritage deeply influenced by and rooted in the traditions of Spain and Portugal, Ferdinand and Isabella's 1492 expulsion of the Jews, the Inquisition, and the lingering crypto-Judaism that was still "living" among the Jews in England. Aguilar's father, Emanuel, eventually became Lay Leader in London's Bevis Marks Spanish and Portugese Sephardic Synagogue, and the entire family, including Grace's two younger brothers, Emanuel and Henry,[22] actively participated in its community. To what degree the Aguilars were religiously observant, however, is difficult to determine. Sarah Aguilar provided her daughter with much of her religious education and by 1830, Emanuel, forced to take a leave of absence for illness from work, educated Grace in Jewish history and Hebrew at home.[23]

Figure 1: "Portrait the Author" from the 1886 Groombridge and Sons edition of Aguilar's *The Women of Israel*.

Historically, scholars have placed Jewish education in the male dominated space of the synagogue. The Aguilars' centering of the religious education of their

children and religious observances within the domestic space of the home reveals the depth to which crypto-Jewish heritage was still ingrained in the everyday religious and cultural practices of the Sephardim in nineteenth century England; a group whose ancestors had adopted such practices out of fear and desperation to survive Inquisitorial persecution. During this time the safety and secrecy of the home became the center of Jewish education and practice. In *Heretics or Daughters of Israel?*, Renée Melammed explains that the demise of Jewish institutional life during the Inquisition—the synagogue in particular—also meant the demise of ordained rabbis and teachers. Bibles, prayer books, and copies of the Talmud began to disappear as well, and "the time and energy that was spent on keeping some semblance of Jewishness within the household had more significance than ever. . . . [Men] were deprived of the public domain [of the synagogue] in which they traditionally functioned as Jews. For the women . . . there was now a greater responsibility and an awareness that they had become the central bearers of the Jewish heritage" (73, 168).[24] As a result, Jewish education was impossible to secure during the Inquisition and the safe transmission of cultural, religious, and sacred practices shifted to the domestic and private sphere of the home. Thus, women began to play leading roles in preserving and conveying Jewish faith by passing it on to their children through oral tradition. Mothers as storytellers became centrally important to crypto-Jewish existence and, as a result of Catholic oppression, they were responsible for passing down that culture and keeping the religion, to the best

of their ability under the threat of persecution, alive within their family unit. In *Hidden Heritage: The Legacy of the Crypto-Jews*, Janet Liebman Jacobs explains that medieval forced conversion and oppression "blurred" the gender boundaries of traditional Sephardic life and "mothers, rather than fathers, fulfilled the commandment to teach their sons the beliefs and laws of Judaism. This shift in Women's [sic] roles contributed to the development of a female-centered spiritual culture that characterized the crypto-Jewish household" (46).[25] As a Sephardic woman, Aguilar embraces her crypto-Jewish heritage—as storyteller, procurer, and promoter of Jewish ritual, spirituality, and culture—and eventually promotes this once secret existence in her re-invention of the practice for nineteenth century consumption. As I discuss throughout the following chapters, Aguilar transforms the secretive and life-threatening reality of crypto-Jewish heritage into a private and life-affirming model of Anglo-Jewry for nineteenth century England. Through her mother and her father, then, Aguilar received the "Oral History" of the Iberian Jews and by 1823 she had begun to write.[26]

Until roughly the last decade, critical scholarship on Aguilar has been sparse. Beth-Zion Lask Abrahams' 1952 essay, "Grace Aguilar: A Centenary Tribute," was the first to provide substantial discussion and biographical material. While other critics,[27] notably Michael Ragussis and Cynthia Scheinberg, have more recently explored Grace Aguilar's importance as a Jewish woman writer in nineteenth century England, the most comprehensive work has been done by Michael Galchinsky. In

2003, Galchinsky published *Grace Aguilar: Selected Writings*. While bringing together selections from some of Aguilar's most important prose and poetry in one volume (until Galchinsky's book all of Aguilar's work had long been out of print), Galchinsky also includes excerpts from Aguilar's unpublished Frankfurt journals—her last known writings before her death in 1847—as well as other supplemental materials concerning Judaism and conversionist literatures of the early nineteenth century. However, it is in his chapter on Aguilar in his 1996 book, *The Origin of the Modern Jewish Woman Writer: Romance and Reform in Victorian England* that Galchinsky argues,

> in setting out to convince Christian liberals to quit their [philo-Semitic] tactics of toleration . . . Aguilar agreed to a trade-off: Jews would in turn restrict their expressions of difference to the domestic sphere. . . . In regard to gender, too, Aguilar produced a trade-off: if Jewish men would provide women with education, women would in turn restrict their sphere of influence to the home. . . . [Aguilar] balanced demands with concessions, both in relation to men and the dominant culture. (136)

In order to end philo-Semitic oppression, Galchinsky suggests that Aguilar's "bargain," as he later refers to it,[28] relegates both Judaism and women to the domestic sphere, to the secrecy of the "home." Making such a "concession," argues Galchinsky, was Aguilar's way of appeasing a nineteenth century society that was uncomfortable with Jews and Judaism, as well as with women seeking social and educational advancement. Though perhaps intended to suggest that she was striking a "deal" with the British public, Galchinsky's terming Aguilar's mission a "bargain" ultimately cheapens the value and lessens the import of her project; it also evokes

those very negative stereotypes—Jews as money lenders, as hagglers, peddlers, and as "Shylock"—that Aguilar assiduously avoided writing about in her fiction. As we peel back the layers of Aguilar's texts, what appear as restrictions—what Galchinsky calls "concessions"—instead empower women's domestic role within Judaism and further empower women and Judaism within the larger context of nineteenth century society. While her Judaism might distinguish her as Other in nineteenth century England, Aguilar is unwilling to pay the price, even if it is a "bargain," of hiding or denying any part of her Jewishness for the false illusion of security, comfort, and privilege that Martin and Mohanty call "not being home." For Aguilar, Jews must be willing to shed the "illusion" if they have any hope of ever really "being home."

But what, exactly, does "home" itself mean to Aguilar and how does her vision for a fully integrated Anglo-Jewish home differ from the more common practice of assimilation that was taking place at the same time? The answer to this question, like Aguilar's project itself, is multi-layered. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary* "home" is :

> 2. A dwelling—place, house, abode; the fixed residence of a family or household; the seat of domestic life and interests.
>
> 3. The place of one's . . . nurturing.
>
> 5. A place, region, or state to which one properly belongs, in which one's affections center, or where one finds refuge, rest, or satisfaction.
>
> 5b. (adv) to touch, affect, or move intimately.

> 6. One's own country, one's native land.
>
> 9. In games: The place in which one is free from attack; the point which one tries to reach; the goal.[29]

I argue that Aguilar's home includes both a domestic space (a house) where individuals are nurtured and a public "region" or "state," that is, a country where one "belongs." As part of that belonging, however, home must also be "the place in which one is free from attack." "The goal" for Aguilar is to create a place for Jews to exist in which they do not have to fear persecution or the threat of conversion, where they can exist as Jews, not as potential converts—a place "free from attack." In Martin and Mohanty's terms, Aguilar's ideal for Jews is always feeling and "being at home"; "not being home" (living under the "illusion" of acceptance as a convert) is not an option. In order to secure such a place, Aguilar employs fiction to "touch," to "affect," to "move" her audience's sentiments regarding Jews away from stereotyped misconceptions and attacks toward acceptance and integration. Inherent in this vision is the nurturing and educating of both the domestic space and family as well as the British nation and its society. The two must work in tandem to nurture each other if Jews are to survive in England. Thus, rather than assimilate into the mainstream, Aguilar pushes for acceptance and integration on what she determined as the most acceptable terms possible for both Jews and Christians. Aguilar is careful in her attempt to keep Christians appeased and open to the possibility of change while also firmly maintaining the real importance of Jewish heritage and the practice of Judaism more generally. Thus, clarifying the difference between assimilation and

integration also becomes essential if we are to fully understand what, exactly, an Anglo-Jewish home meant for Grace Aguilar.

Few critics who have explored Aguilar's work have noted the important distinction between assimilation and integration. Paula Hyman comes the closest in *Gender and Assimilation in Modern Jewish History: The Roles and Representations of Women* when she suggests that Jews "did not intend to disappear as a recognizable group into a homogeneous national society" (16). However, Hyman ultimately relies on "assimilation" and "acculturation" to define the Jewish desire to "fit in" to the larger society when she argues that Aguilar's defense of Jews and Judaism "derived from [her] assumption[s] about gender and assimilation widespread among acculturated Jews of her generation" (35). The *OED* defines assimilation as "the action of making or becoming like" and "conversion into a similar substance."[30] Acculturation is the "adoption and assimilation of an alien culture."[31] Inherent in both of these terms is the idea of absorption, of abandoning the characteristics that define a person, group, or thing as different in favor of adapting fully the characteristics of the group or system trying to absorb. To assimilate (and thus to be acculturated) warrants conversion on some level in order to become absorbable and thus conform to the dominant group. The two feed off of each other: the minority cannot be absorbed by the majority unless the minority relinquish their difference in favor of social norms and the dominant group will not assimilate the "alien culture" unless they have become like the norm.[32] Integration, though similar, I would argue

in Aguilar's case, functions in a fundamentally different way. By bringing together "separate parts or elements" in order "to form one whole,"[33] integration does not lend itself to absorption and the further loss of identity that assimilation and acculturation demand. In *The Origin of the Modern Jewish Woman Writer*, Michael Galchinsky proposes that Aguilar's call to "hide"

> Jewish ritual in the house would help ensure that outsiders would not comprehend the full extent of Jews' differentness: if Christians were allowed to view the secret rituals, they might lose sight of the similarities in spirit for the strangeness of the forms. English Jews might not be able to pass as English and as a result might suffer social or political ostracism. . . . The English Jews' secret space is not only where they escape from the dominant "technologies of power"; it is also a positive place in which Jewish subculture can flourish. Because the home hides Jews' practice of their formal differences, it enables them to broadcast the elements of their essential sameness to Christians. It enables them to appear like Christian Liberals in public—assimilating Christian literature, dress, music, and other social forms. The secret space thus enables their successful integration through assimilation. At the same time, it enables them to continue to perform their cultural particularity behind their 'veil,' ensuring generational continuity and the maintenance of tradition, if only in a shrunken sphere. (150)

What Galchinsky describes here is the "secret space" of historical crypto-Judaism, not the open, yet private, vision Aguilar promoted in her vision for Anglo-Jewry. While many nineteenth century British Jews wanted to "blend in" in the way Galchinsky describes, Aguilar strongly pleaded with readers to keep from succumbing to assimilation in this way—and for good reason. Todd Endelman explains that the "Sephardi community [in England] was simply too weak in moral and political authority to counteract the negative impact of the Marrano experience and guide former Marranos and their families back into the bosom of traditional Jewish life"

(33). Aware of this difficulty, Aguilar embraces the "weakness" of crypto-Jewish heritage—because it was one of the few elements of their cultural and religious history Sephardi Jews knew for sure at the time—to integrate Jews as Jews and to breed strength instead of weakness.

In the *Jewish Faith* Aguilar imagines the sense of powerlessness and fear that the crypto-Jews of Spain and Portugal suffered as they tried to keep some semblance of Jewish faith and heritage alive behind their veils and within the secrecy of their homes:

> [T]o be even suspected as a Jew exposed our ancestors to all the horrors of the Inquisition, sequestration, torture, and often even death. The religion of their fathers, therefore, was instilled with such impenetrable secrecy, and so burdened with caution and constant dread of discovery that, to do more than attend to its mere elements, and keep the mind faithful to the doctrine of . . . Jewish Faith, in contradistinction to the bewildering dogmas of the saints, martyrs, infallibility of the Roman Church, masses, etc., was impossible. To become spiritual was equally so; for the Bible was a forbidden book . . . to the Secret Jews. Those, therefore, who from some imminent pressure of danger fled to other countries, were unable to throw off the caution of centuries. They could not realise that the yoke was so far removed from their necks, as to permit the *public* practice and *open* confession of their faith. To speak of, or impart it . . . had so long been utter impossibility, that it was scarcely unnatural, that they should suppose it impossible still, when in reality no impossibility existed. This is the reason why so many of our ancient Spanish and Portugese families, when they came to England, adhered so very strictly to the *form*, to the utter exclusion of the *spirit* of their religion, and never spoke of nor attempted to teach it, except by desiring a soulless obedience, which had no power. . . . We must regret this, but we can scarcely wonder at it. They could not teach the spirit of their faith, for they knew it not themselves. (40-41)

The main difference between Aguilar's vision and the historical practice of crypto-Judaism as she describes it is that Aguilar promoted the acknowledgment of one's

Judaism—"hiding" and "secrecy" were not viable options—but not the flaunting, or public display of the religion; religious practice and ritual must be kept behind closed doors. Historically, there was no acknowledgment of "Jewishness" for the crypto-Jew; even the rumor of potential "Judaizing" in medieval Spain, for example, could result in imprisonment at the very least. To be a known Judaizer during the Inquisition, practicing in secret, resulted in forced conversion or death, while for Aguilar the knowledge of one's Judaism caused little if any harm (relatively speaking) as long as religious practices took place in private. The greatest fear for Aguilar's Jews, perhaps, was the fear of rejection, of not gaining social acceptance in English society. But this sacrifice was small in exchange for the freedom to maintain one's beliefs and one's dignity, to remain both a practicing Jew and to know what it meant to be Jewish. Aguilar's vision of "home" involves transformation of crypto-Judaism; she advocates keeping Jewish practice private, not secret, while also seeking to bring Jews out of hiding, as Jews, without the fear of persecution.

Thus, as the "homeless" product of a diaspora that had been displaced and exiled throughout history, nineteenth century British Jews, though ostensibly welcomed at England's shores, were fighting a similar battle as their ancestors—a battle fundamentally grounded in the desire for acceptance, as Jews, in the lands that offered refuge. Conversionists could not imagine a world in which "real" Jews were at home in Britain, but Aguilar has little difficulty and imagines her own British world in which such a union "is perfectly compatible":

> The assimilation in social, domestic, and individual life of the Jew and Gentile, touche[d] not their respective creeds. Wherever he is, in whatever land, whatever company, whatever position, a Hebrew is known as a Hebrew—and he should glory in that distinction . . . and neither be ashamed of it himself, nor occasion others to look down upon him with contempt. He can retain all the characteristics of his . . . creed, and yet, in social, domestic, and individual position, be one with the children of that land which has received the exiles to her fostering breast, and extended the right hand of fellowship to all. Let us be English men and English women, even while we still glory in being Hebrews. This union is perfectly compatible. . . . to be a noble body of English Jews, and mark our pre-eminence in the land where we are FREE. . . . How glorious would be that consolidation, that unity, which the moment a Jew of any land sets foot in England there to make his home, would hail him brother, and open to him at once. . . . Hebrews and Englishmen—we may look round the world, but what prouder titles can be our own! (559-560)

As a Jewish and English woman—though her ancestors immigrated from Spain and Portugal, Aguilar herself was born and raised in England—Aguilar embodies the difficulties associated with balancing the duality of both identities; however, as she makes quite clear throughout her letters, journals and fictional works, Jews need not choose religion over nation or nation over religion: "We do not require the sacrifice of the one to fit us for the other; for the more we felt that, as Hebrews, we are cherished, equalised, honoured, the more ardent would become our love for the land granting us these things, the more earnest our desire to serve her and her children with heart in hand" (562). Rather than fear the "innovation" of such a union and force Jews to make an either/or decision—either relinquish Jewish identity entirely and assimilate as a Christian or embrace Judaism and suffer ostracism from English society—Aguilar sees the "union" of both identities as "perfectly compatible." "Let us be English men and English women, even while we still glory in being Hebrews"

Aguilar declares as she conceptualizes the entirety of her literary agenda in her plea for "a noble body of English Jews. . . . How glorious would be that consolidation, that unity."

Aguilar insists that Jews can and should become an integrated part of English society without having to sacrifice their Jewish identity; complete absorption, or assimilation, resonates as little less than formal conversion. Further, in the expression of her desire for Jews to feel "at home" in England as well as in other lands they inhabit, Aguilar argues that they

> should, indeed, feel and act the part of faithful citizens where such privileges are allowed us; but we are not to consider ourselves so completely children of the soil, as to forget we are children of the Lord. . . . We can never be other than a distinct nation. . . . Surely we can unite this belief with the feelings of a[n] . . . English citizen. We do not require the sacrifice of the one to fit us for the other; for the more we felt that, as Hebrews, we are cherished, equalised, honoured, the more ardent would become our love for the land granting us these things, the more earnest our desire to serve her, and her children, with heart in hand. (562)

Aguilar's argument on behalf of Jewish integration, however, also indirectly criticizes and challenges Christian England. At the same time that she makes her case for *why* Jews should be able to integrate socially as Jews, she questions England's own religious and spiritual devotion as a nation. In a spiritually advanced country, as she considered America, she argues, Jews enjoy "perfect freedom" where there is "neither persecution nor interference," where a Jew may display "not only his public adherence to his religion, but the sanctity of his house, according to the domestic, as well as social and ceremonial laws of Moses; and he is free to become mentally and

spiritually elevated, and to raise the name of Israelite by deed as well as faith" (565). Integration is not only possible, according to Aguilar, but is realized. In less advanced countries: "this absence of perfect nationality . . . is attributable, not to imperfection in Judaism, but to intimate association with a people . . . whose very religion is devoid of the solemnity of form, and sacredness of restriction, peculiar to Protestant lands. . . . But it is in the country of the *true*, not of the *nominal* Protestant that the Hebrew is at rest, and where his religion will attain to greater vitality and strength and spirituality than in any other land" (562). While Aguilar never directly calls England a land of "nominal Protestants," the implication is certainly just under the surface of her claims, if not clearly, though very briefly, revealed when she asserts that "the Hebrew's advantages in [America are] more numerous than in England" (565). In a "truly enlightened nation" such as America, suggests Aguilar, Jews are "FREE! and the mind and spirit, released from the shackles of darkness and persecution, can once more resume the native dignity and mental superiority and spiritual aspirations, peculiar to his race and creed, and which through long ages of oppression were invisible indeed, but never lost" (564). Aguilar criticizes England's philo-Semitic ideology here. *Of course* her beloved England is not guilty of such behavior; she refers to *other* unenlightened nations. But again, just beneath the surface looms the question: are the British the enlightened Protestant nation that is capable of integrating Jews as Jews, allowing them to exist "FREE!" Is England as "free" as America?

While the English might have ceased their overtly negative treatment of Jews, Aguilar was well aware that they nevertheless made their desires for assimilation and conversion to the dominant Christian culture well known: "In but too many parts of the world, the Israelites are still the subjects of scorn, hatred, and persecution; and their condition is, in consequence, the lowest and most awfully degraded in the scale of man. . . . yet even here, where mind, principle, honour, all seem overthrown from such brutalising [sic] influence, the affections retain their power" (4). While passionately insisting that Jews do integrate as English citizens, Aguilar makes clear that Jews must never forget that "the differences between [their] holy religion and that of other nations [are] more strongly marked" (564). Jews must "study the *doctrines* and adhere to the *forms* as well as be infused with the *spirit* of [their] faith" (564). "We must learn in what we differ so widely from our Gentile brother," she urges, "that, while we acknowledge the same moral law, and experience the same spiritual aspirations, there should be such an impassable barrier between us, that we must ever keep apart, guarded . . . from the constant attempts to lure us from our creed" (564). Jews must remain "a distinct and never assimilating nation" (565) and never forfeit their identity as Jews. As her prose makes clear, Aguilar insists that Jews not "hide," not merely "pass," or "appear" like Christian liberals in order to gain entrance into British society while they take off the mask in the privacy of their homes to light the Sabbath candles in secrecy.

However, Aguilar's transformation of secret, medieval crypto-Judaism into a private Anglo-Judaism is not a sweeping of nineteenth century British Jewry under the proverbial rug. Unwilling to suppress her Jewishness, or for Jews to suppress their Jewishness for "an admission ticket into Western culture" as Heinrich Heine once called it (qtd in Garb 25), Aguilar passionately explains that Jewish "hearts must breath from our lips in this avowal of our faith. . . . Nor will it be in our closets only, we shall feel all that we have gained; we shall go forth, no longer striving to conceal our religion through shame" (*Spirit of Judaism* 19). If we view Aguilar's appropriation of crypto-Judaism within the context of what Caren Kaplan discusses as "reinhabit[ing] a world of our own making" (365), then her conception of "home" becomes not only where she locates the center of Anglo-Judaism, but it must also be a "place with room for what can be salvaged from the past and what can be made new" (364-365). Thus, Aguilar re-invents the crypto-Judaism of the past and uses her powers of storytelling both to salvage Jewish history and to structure a home for Jews in a British world of *her* own making. What results is a kind of prototype for what she hoped British Jewry, Anglo-Judaism, might become.

But why bring Judaism "in" if only to bring it "out" in the narratives eventually? Why insist on the importance of privacy when she will publicly write about Jewish practices, observances, beliefs and rituals in stories like *The Vale of Cedars*, *The Perez Family*, "The Escape," "The Edict," as well as in her more overtly Jewish texts? Michael McKeon suggests that nineteenth century domestic fiction

"takes formal expression in the way domestic realism 'solves' the formal problem of homelessness by self-consciously internalizing it within domestic and psychological interiors" (439).[34] Bringing Judaism inside the domestic space as Aguilar does, veiling it from public scrutiny "solves" homelessness in a similar way. According to McKeon, the "homeless" self, once provided with a domestic space within the larger cultural body, is able to establish a "psychological interior" that would not otherwise be possible. McKeon's model suggests that the nineteenth century domestic novel actively seeks to reconcile self with society; it depicts the "homeless" self searching for, and finding, a place to settle.

Aguilar contends that by confining religious observation and ritual to the home Jews can guard and protect the sacredness of a religion and a practice that had been distorted throughout history. Judaism and Jewish education can flourish and strengthen under the caring and watchful eyes of Jewish mothers and fathers and away from pressures to convert that might, if not taint individual as well as familial and communal devotion. Bringing Judaism "in" also primes letting "out" the "right" version of Judaism. Centuries of oppression and sketchy histories and tales written by non-Jews defined Jews and Judaism as something they never were. What resulted was a disfigured history that not only the Christian society around them believed, but many Jews began to internalize themselves. With their overwhelming desire to assimilate, to "fit in" to and feel "at home" in their surroundings, Jews also "imbibed prejudices, customs, and even the sentiments which belong[ed]—not to their

religion, but to the lands of their captivity and compelled adoption" (*Women of Israel* 556). Aguilar addresses the problem that Sander Gilman explores in *Jewish Self-Hatred: Anti-Semitism and the Hidden Language of the Jews*: "Self-hatred results from the outsiders' acceptance of the mirage of themselves generated by their reference group—that group in society which they see as defining them—as reality" (Gilman 2). Thus, Jews were often more willing to convert to Christianity so they could distance themselves from the negativity, the stereotypes, and the prejudices of Jewish "history." In her effort to begin to correct her history as well as her present, Aguilar brings "in" the distorted ideas that conversionists promoted and then re-releases the elements of the "right" Judaism back "out" into her texts for public consumption. As a result, Christians would begin to see that Jews were ethically, morally, even spiritually, not all that unlike themselves.

In *Gendered Spaces*, Daphne Spain suggests that "spatial segregation is one of the mechanisms by which a group with greater power can maintain its advantage over a group with less power. By controlling access to knowledge and resources through the control of space, the dominant group's ability to retain and reinforce its position is enhanced" (15-16). As Aguilar's texts reinforce, however, the group with lesser power also has the ability to protect themselves by self-imposing their own spatial boundaries. Aguilar imposes these boundaries when she calls for the centering of Jewish practices and ritual or cultural observances in the home. Further, by allowing glimpses of ritual practice only through the medium of the novel,

Aguilar revises conversionist accounts of Jewish existence. She also empowers a culture and its people through the same methods used to strip Anglo-Jews of what little internal power and communal cohesiveness they had. Spain goes on to explain that "the power of a dominant group lies in its ability to control constructions of reality that reinforce its own status so that subordinate groups accept the social order and their place in it" (17). When looking at Aguilar's proposition in this light what becomes most striking is that she, as a Jewish woman and thus one "less powerful" because of her gender and her faith, nevertheless attempted to determine the boundaries—what was acceptable—for the dominant group (Christians), rather than their determining her proper position and function as both a woman and a Jew. By revising crypto-Judaism and reeducating the Christian estimation and further understanding of Jews and their practices in this way—both historically and in contemporary society—Aguilar, as one doubly marginalized, attempted to write new standards not only for Jews, but for the entirety of the English nation.

Thus, the private home becomes for Aguilar what Leonore Davidoff describes as "the source of consciousness that generates public activity" (173). Because the nineteenth century "private" home was often on display, and not always a "private" domain, Aguilar tries to secure a safe place for Jews, in their homes, that was, in fact, secluded from outside influence and attempts at conversion. But this seclusion does not keep her from participating in what Karen Chase and Michael Levenson call the "spectacle of intimacy": the "thrusting outward of an inward turning, the eruption of

family life into the light of unrelenting public discussion" (12). By writing about Jews and Judaism, Aguilar paradoxically shows us the very practices she argues Jews should keep behind closed doors. As a result, she "generates public activity" on behalf of Jews by allowing the public, a primarily Christian reading public, glimpses of the *reality* of Judaism—a portrait of a struggling Anglo-Jewish family—instead of the false stereotypes excessively depicted in conversionist texts. These portraits are significant because the contemporary images of Jewish life and culture in circulation at this time were wildly exaggerated and decidedly negative. Aguilar argues with a sense of urgency that such prejudices, when translated from actions into words—be it in novels, sermons, or tracts—become most damaging:

> The mischief produced by *words* is incalculable, and even more dangerous than that by actions. The latter we can guard against: the former is invisible and impalpable, but mostly deadly . . . WORDS which if we could but examine or enquire into their foundation, would literally dissolve into nothing! But once spoken, who can recall them, or who can remove the sting, which sometimes even simply an unguarded expression will produce? The slanderer, the caluminator, the liar, even the prevaricator, characters the most despicable and the most mischievous, are all produced by *words*, merely words. (*Jewish Faith* 58-59)

Heavily controlled and often idealistic, Aguilar's words and her pictures of Jews and Jewish life are carefully chosen as she "lets the public in" to the Jewish world; they see only what Aguilar wants them to see, no more.

Aguilar occupies a unique and important position in British, Jewish, and literary histories because she wrote about Judaism and Jewishness from the inside out. Unlike her non-Jewish contemporaries who did not study or read Jewish texts,

who did not (could not) understand the inner-workings of Jewish culture and religion and thus had little real knowledge of Jews and Judaism, Aguilar took the inner, private, world of Judaism as she knew it and put it on display. "The press, or the literature of a country," she argues, "is always the only sure criterion of the ideas, not of a few, but of a nation" (338). As Aguilar observes early on, England's "press" conveyed the sentiments of a society driven by religious conversion in its desire to secure the identity of a British national home that was uniformly Christian. She was determined to ensure that the literature, and thus the sentiment, of *her* nation, *her* country, was not corrupted by prejudice. Rather, the literature of Aguilar's England must depict Jews thriving in their "adopted home" and "check the zealous efforts of conversionists by convincing them, that . . . no effort of man can turn us from [Judaism]" (*Women of Israel* 325-326).

Notes

1. See Henry Francis Offley's *Richard Brothers, Neither a Madman nor an Impostor*. 1795. 8-9. Quoted in Frank Felsenstein's *Anti-Semitic Stereotypes: a Paradigm of Otherness in English Popular Culture, 1660-1830*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1995. 65.

2. Though not published until 1844, Aguilar's letters indicate that she was writing the *Records of Israel*, in which "The Edict" is included, in 1840.

3. Though the term was not coined until 1879, I use "anti-Semitism" throughout my dissertation to denote the social sentiment regarding Jews, Judaism, and Jewishness in nineteenth century England. Like Judith Page's usage of the term in *Imperfect Sympathies: Jews and Judaism in British Romantic Literature and Culture*, my use of "anti-Semitism" refers to the "derogatory and demeaning attitudes toward Jews and Jewish culture, even before 1879" (xiv). Also see Frank Felsentein's comments regarding terminology in *Anti-Semitic Stereotypes: A Paradigm of Otherness in English Popular Culture. 1660-1830*, 7-9.

4. Other tales include: *Leila Ada, The Jewish Convert: An Authentic Memoir*; *Miriam; or, The Power of Truth: A Jewish Tale*; *Julamerk; or, The Converted Jewess*; *The Conversion of Mr. And Mrs. Levi*; *Sophia de Lissau: A Portraiture of the Jews of the Nineteenth Century; Being an Outline of their Religious and Domestic Habits With Explanatory Notes*; *Tales of a Jewess; Illustrating the Domestic Customs and Manner of the Jews*.

5. See Ragussis, *Figures of Conversion*, chapter 1.

6. Todd Endelman explains that in 1290 Edward I barred Jews by royal edict from visiting or living in England. The official ban lasted through the mid-1650s, when in 1655 Oliver Cromwell and the Council of State convened in the Whitehall Conference "to investigate the possibility of admitting the Jews" (14). The Conference ended without a formal decision and though Jews' legal status remained undefined, Cromwell "unofficially" permitted Jewish settlement in England. Historians tend to agree that the conversionist and missionary impulse, in conjunction with the potential for England's economic growth, are what motivated Cromwell in his decision. See Endelman, *The Jews of Georgian England*, chapter 1.

7. While I describe this transition for Jews in England, Sephardic Jews who settled in the Ottoman Empire, the Netherlands, Germany and France had different experiences of acceptance.

8. Martin and Mohanty are interested in "home" or "homelessness" as it relates to Minnie Bruce Pratt's "Identity: Skin, Blood, Heart." Pratt, who is Christian, Southern, White, and middle-class, struggles with her identity and is "other" because she is a lesbian.

9. The crypto-Jews were derogatorily called multiple names. Most popular, however, was the term *Marrano* which references several things. It is derived from the Hebrew *Mar' at 'Ayin*, or Appearance of the Eye, referring to the fact that these Jews were only ostensibly Christian, as well as from the word *Mumar*, or *Mumarano*, meaning apostate and the Arabic *Mura'in,* meaning hypocrite. Ultimately, the meaning stems from "an old Spanish term dating back to the early Middle Ages and meaning swine. Applied to recent converts . . . perhaps ironically, with reference to their aversion from the flesh of the animal in question, it ultimately became a general term of execration which spread during the sixteenth century to most of the languages in western Europe. The word expresses succinctly and unmistakably all the depth of hatred and contempt which the ordinary Spaniard felt for the [Jew]." Other terms include: "*Anusim*—the 'Forced ones,' who had adopted the dominant religion under duress. . . . *conversos*—a term which [was] applied only to the actual converts themselves. . . . New Christians (*Nuevos Christianos*) to distinguish them from the general population of "Old Christians." Satirically, they

were sometimes termed *Alboraycos*, from al-Burrak, the marvelous steed of Mohammed, which was neither horse nor mule, male nor female—much like the persons to whom the name was applied, who were neither Jews nor Christians." See Roth, *History*, 28.

10. Crypto-Judaism dates back to the 1391 riots and attacks against Jews in Spain that led to their forced baptism. Though many Jews accepted Christianity, many more did so only outwardly and continued to practice Judaism secretly. See Michael Alpert's *Crypto-Judaism and the Spanish Inquisition*, 1-12.

11. Though not the case for all Jews, this reality was an unfortunate one for the Sephardim population living in Western Europe.

12. Though unofficially readmitted to England, the Jewish Sephardim were particularly sought out by Cromwell for their wealth and the economic and trading boon he was certain their readmission would inspire for England at the time. Roth explains that Cromwell's readmission of the Jews was almost entirely "practical." Cromwell "was quick to realize the material advantages which the Jews could bring to England, as they had done to Holland and other countries. . . . Spanish and Portugese merchants, with their far-flung international connections, could play an important part, assisting to establish London as a principal center of European commerce" (*History*, 260-261).

13. Bryan Cheyette further explains in "Neither Black Nor White: The Figure of 'the Jew' in Imperial British Literature," that "the Jew" played "a specific role" in England's "quest for [a] national or European identity. . . . [and was] an important aspect of this larger anxiety"(31). "The Jew" exposed "widespread tensions in imperial culture concerning the whiteness and racial purity of British society" (31). In *Religion, Toleration, and British Writing, 1790-1830*, Mark Canuel also notes that the British nation saw itself as a "community by virtue of its religious communion. This was a unity dependent upon uniformity of belief. . . . Unsettling that uniformity by admitting adherents of nonconforming faiths would endanger not only the 'security of church and state' but Britain's 'national humanity'"(12).

14. While philo-Semitism is a term used in conjunction with conversionist ideology almost exclusively, it also can indicate sympathy toward Jews without conversionist motivations. That is, it is important to be aware that not all philo-Semites were conversionists, even though the majority were. As David Katz explains, English philo-Semitism "was often convoluted and complex, and its proponents frequently assimilated a variety of motives" (7). See *Philo-Semitism and the Readmission of the Jews to England 1603-1655*.

15. See Bannet, *Domestic Revolution* for this definition of the "long nineteenth century."

16. Katz explains that it was "during the early seventeenth century" that a "philo-Semitic view of contemporary Jewry developed" (7). Also see Roth, *History*, 259.

17. See Judith Page's *Imperfect Sympathies* (16-17, 46-51) for further discussion of Hazlitt's essay.

18. I reference here the 1805 and 1806 definitions and usages of innovation and innovate collected in the *OED*. See http://dictionary.oed.com/. June 9, 2004.

19. S.B.'s lengthy discussion promotes negative stereotypes of Jews as "intolerant," as having an "unconquerable aversion to the Christian religion," and as "swarms of pedlars . . . [who] have a tendency to corrupt the morals of the people . . . [and prey] upon their fellow creatures. . . . it is not fulfilling our duty to our children, to connect them with the encouragers of doubt and infidelity, and the avowed enemies of our religion" (88-89).

20. Aguilar reveals how she views her position as an author in an 1845 letter to the American Miriam Moses Cohen. The niece of Rebecca Gratz, Miriam and her husband Solomon kept fairly regular correspondence with Aguilar between November 1842 and July 1846. See Michael Galchinsky's "Grace Aguilar's Correspondence." *Jewish Culture and History* 2 (1999): 88-110. Also, in an unpublished 1840 letter to Isaac D'Israeli, Aguilar conveys "the hope, the wish, the intense longing to find the talent intrusted to me adding its mite to the moral benefit . . . of my fellow creatures, that my lowly efforts, would touch . . . chords, in the gentle minds." She goes on to explain that fame is not what she seeks, but rather that "the talents, my God has lent me were not entirely wasted, by withering unused." Letter from Grace Aguilar to Isaac D'Israeli, 29 July 1840. From Michael Galchinsky's private transcriptions.

21. Private letters suggest that Aguilar began writing *Spirit* in 1830/31. Aguilar sent the manuscript to the founder of the American Jewish Publication Society, Isaac Leeser, in 1839; however, it was lost and Aguilar had to re-write. *Spirit* was eventually published in 1842. Leeser explains in his Preface to the text: "Somewhat more than two years ago, Miss A. having finished her work sent it out to America through a private channel; but from some cause unknown it never reached me. She had accordingly to undertake the laborious task of re-writing it from her original sketches, and she completed it anew about this time last year [January 1841]. Last May I at length received this long-expected book, and had it not been for many unforseen interruptions, its publication would not have been delayed till this time. The work is now, however, safely afloat on the ocean of public opinion" (1).

22. Ironically, both brothers eventually converted to Christianity when they married.

23. In her biographical sketch of her daughter, Sarah Aguilar writers that "with the exception of eighteen months passed at school, her mother was her sole instructress, and both parents took equal delight in directing her studies. . . . [H]er father commenced a regular course of instruction . . . by reading aloud, while she was employed in drawing, needlework, &c. History was selected . . . that being the study which now most interested her. . . . Her mother also required her to read sermons, and study religion and the Bible regularly; this was readily submitted to, first as a task, but afterwards with much delight. . . . Nor did Grace Aguilar study religion for her own personal observance and profit. She embraced its *principles* (the principles of all creeds) in a widely extended and truly liberal sense. She carried her practice of its holy and benevolent precepts into every minutiæ of her daily life. . . . steadily venerating and adhering to her own faith" (*Memoir of Grace Aguilar* v-viii). For further information regarding Aguilar's background and family history see Michael Galchinsky's *Selected Writings* and Beth Abraham Lask's "Grace Aguilar: A Centenary Tribute."

24. Galchinsky also explains that "it was not uncommon for Sephardic women and men who had lived through the Inquisition [to] educate their daughters. In fact, Sephardic women were often seen as responsible for transmitting Jewish culture and history, since the Inquisition had shut down male Judaic spaces such as schools and synagogues" (*Selected Writings* 18).

25. In *The History of the Marranos* Cecil Roth also explains that "It is significant that women took prominent a part in . . . Judaism . . . and were in some instances peculiarly meticulous in their observance. . . . It was by mothers and wives that the Marrano circle . . . was presided over and inspired. Ultimately it became customary for a woman to act as the spiritual leader of the Marrano groups. It is a striking manifestation of the essential position by the woman in Jewish life" (175).

26. Aguilar kept a journal from the age of seven and wrote her first drama, "Gustavas Vasa" (never published and now lost) by the time she was 12. She published her first book of poetry at 19, *The Magic Wreath of Hidden Flowers*.

27. A number of literary histories briefly mention her work: See Frank Modder's *The Jew in the Literature of England*. Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1939; Edward Calisch's *The Jew in English Literature*. Richmond: Bells Book and Stationary Publishers, 1909; and Linda Kuzmack's *Woman's Cause: The Jewish Woman's Movement in England and the United States, 1881-1933*. Columbus: Ohio State UP, 1990. For further critical discussions see Michael Ragussis's *Figures of Conversion: "The Jewish Question" & English National Identity*; and Paula Hyman's *Gender and Assimilation in Modern Jewish History: The Roles and Representations of*

Women. A chapter of Cynthia Sheinberg's *Women's Poetry and Religion in Victorian England: Jewish Identity and Christian Culture* explores Aguilar's contribution through her early poetry.

28. Galchinsky uses this term throughout the Aguilar chapter in *Origin*, as well as the foundation for his argument in, "Modern Jewish Women's Dilemmas: Grace Aguilar's Bargains." *Literature and Theology* 11 (1997): 26-45.

29. http://dictionary.oed.com/, home. May 5, 2004.

30. http://dictionary.oed.com/, assimilation, assimilate. March 1, 2004.

31. http://dictionary.oed.com/, acculturation, acculturate. March 1, 2004.

32. For further discussion see Samuel Klausner, "Assimilation as Social Death." *Jewish Assimilation, Acculturation and Accommodation: Past Traditions, Current Issues and Future Prospects*." Ed. Menachem Mor. New York: UP of America, 1989. 262-303; and Barry Rubin, *Assimilation and its Discontents*. New York: Random House, 1995.

33. http://dictionary.oed.com/, integration, integrate. March 1, 2004.

34. McKeon makes this statement in his introductory remarks to the section covering domestic fiction, "Privacy, Domesticity, Women" in his critical anthology *Theory of the Novel: A Historical Approach*.

CHAPTER TWO
THE POWER OF THE NOVEL: RE-FORMING PUBLIC OPINION AND COUNTERING CONVERSIONIST CARICATURES

> [D]o you wish to instruct, to convince, to please? Write a novel! Have you a system of religion or politics or manners or social life to inculcate? Write a novel!
>
> —Anonymous, "Novels: Their Meaning and Mission" (1854)

> Grace Aguilar['s]. . . . was a higher aim than merely to amuse. In her religious works and those bearing on Jewish history and doctrine, in prose and verse, she strove to raise her race to a loftier consciousness of their duty and mission, and to educate the general public as to the character of her creed, so often misjudged and caricatured. Her writings breathe a spiritual aroma that indicate the true woman, a refreshing breadth of view, and a chivalrous ardor. It was a woman battling for truth, education, liberality, and her works have won her a place in the ranks of the purest of womankind.
>
> —Abram S. Isaacs, "The Jewess in Authorship" (1892)

In his 1871 article "The Books We Read," L.R. Fewell suggests that overt doctrinal works are "written for the purposes of promulgating the peculiar tenets of some particular denomination. . . . strictly religious in contents, [they will] remain unread upon the bookseller's shelves . . . the doctrinal points which they wish to enforce must be presented in some attractive form to secure the attention of the reading public. Just now the novel is the most attractive form" (61). Grace Aguilar had come to this conclusion more than three decades earlier. Understanding how and why Aguilar came to this conclusion, however, is crucial to understanding her position as a Jewish woman writer who was responding to the conversionist genre as well as her critics within the constructs of Victorian Christian hegemony. Before

exploring Aguilar's literary role more formally, it is important first to clarify the conventions that define the conversionist genre and thus the mindset to which she, through her works, was responding.

Foremost, conversionist authors revised Jewish history by embedding it with stories of successful conversions from Judaism to Christianity. Conversionists also maintained that because Jewish women were particularly oppressed members of society and "in special need of liberation" (39), they were more vulnerable to Christian proselytism. Narratives conflated inaccurate histories with fiction and always ended with the successful conversion, and thus liberation, of the mistreated and oppressed Jewish woman. Often, though not always, set in fifteenth century Spain, these stories also reverse historical crypto-Judaism by depicting Jews as openly and freely Jewish in nineteenth century England. The conversionist heroine no longer secretly practices Judaism, but rather she secretly practices Christianity for fear of persecution from members of her own faith. What resulted was a nineteenth century conception of Judaism that essentially wrote both itself and its own support system into the fabric of British society by establishing a literary means that tried to soften the cultural climate by minimizing "the radical nature of the process of conversion" (32).

We see such characterizations in novels like Amelia Bristow's *Emma de Lissau* (1828). Though set in modern England, Bristow tells the story of a heroine who grapples daily with an oppressive Judaism and her dysfunctional Jewish family; she is

ultimately "saved" by Christianity. One of the most poignant images reiterated throughout the narrative is Emma's secret reliance on her Christian Bible for guidance and strength to see her through the hardships of maintaining her dual identity as an outward Jew and a secret Christian—a kind of "crypto-Christianity": "the possession of this little volume, [was] of incalculable importance to [Emma], both as a source of consolation and instruction, during a long series of afflictive trials, and intolerant persecutions" (Bristow I. 100). Ragussis explains that in these kinds of literary narratives—of Jews secretly reading their Bibles and practicing Christianity—their very existence seemed to depend on the words emanating from the pages. As *Emma de Lissau* forcefully shows "the conversion of the Jew depends neither on the intervention of missionaries, nor on the intervention of miracle, but on the simple act of (secret) reading" (34). Emma cannot reveal her secret; she literally keeps her Christian Bible and her faith "safe beneath her pillow" at night. "She wore the precious parcel in her bosom in the daytime. . . . [A] treasure she wore next to her heart" (Bristow I. 100, 117).

Emma, however, does eventually reveal her secret Christianity: "with a palpitating heart, she said . . . 'I will neither deny or conceal the truth from you. I AM A CHRISTIAN'. . . . [It was] an avowal at once so frank and fearless. . . . Emma . . . at this moment felt elevated beyond herself, and entirely divested of the terror, that until now had ever accompanied any anticipation of discovery" (I. 121). Emma's story exemplifies the conversionist genre because Bristow manufactures a

narrative that champions a converted Jewish maiden and "tells a tale of persecution that reverses the familiar history of the persecution of the Jew by the hegemonic Christian community. In the converted Jew's memoir we read of the new convert's persecution by the Jewish community" (Ragussis 35). As is reinforced relentlessly throughout the novel, Bristow makes sure the reader understands that Emma suffers deeply for her secret devotion to the "the Nazarene faith": "[H]er mother and the Rabbi. . . . wished and resolved to make the apostate, (as they now invariably termed her) as unhappy and degraded as possible, and at the same time prevent any intercourse between her and the junior branches of the family" (I. 146). "Emma de Lissau, the Apostate!" they call her, "The disgrace of an ancient family" (II. 200). Though a "disgrace," Bristow shows that Emma's rejection of Judaism in favor of a secret devotion to Christianity is worth her prolonged familial sufferings; for, in the end, Christianity empowers her and she is rewarded with acceptance, love, and the strength of the savior:

> Emma has been an outcast from her family and nation. Many, and heart-affecting trials, have passed over her. Persecution, penury, in its sharpest form,—deprivations of a peculiar kind,—and perils from false brethren. These have been, as it were, her daily portion. But, let it be here recorded to the glory of God, His grace has been sufficient for her. He has kept her from falling,—established her in the faith,—and fixed her feet in the rock of the ages. . . . After several years thus passed, it pleased the Lord to provide an asylum for Emma de Lissau; she became the wife of an amiable and sincere Christian. (II. 248)

Bristow's characterization of Emma's dilemma and her family's outright prejudice against not only "the Nazarene faith" but the converted Jewish woman was the very

type of literary thematic used to reinforce conversionist claims that there were "many secret Christians among the Jews—that is, Jewish believers in Christ who [were] afraid to confess their conversion for fear of reprisal" (Ragussis 36) from the Jewish nation. Bristow thus invokes what Felsenstein calls "the conversionist myth of the Jews," which supports the idea that Jews share "a secret desire to convert which only the threats of their rabbis and their own obduracy prevent from happening" (109).

Conversionists not only rewrote Jewish history and exaggerated the characteristics of Jews, but they also re-imagined medieval myths like the blood libel.[1] Felsenstein explains that "in a supposedly more tolerant age, the traditional blood libel of the Middle Ages [was] made once again credible by discrete redefinition. Instead of emphasizing widespread belief that Jews indulge in the ritual murder of innocent Christian children, the transposed version of the myth . . . in conversionist discourse . . . has them seeking to kill apostates to Christianity, most particularly their own children" (100). Emma suffers severe threats and ridicule from both her mother and the family rabbi once her conversion is discovered. Though no physical murder is carried out in the novel, Emma does experience a kind of ritual death, or extirpation, from her Jewish family: she is physically isolated, ostracized, and ultimately banished. After discovering her daughter's secret devotion, Emma's mother sharply issues a final ultimatum: "'[Y]ou . . . shall decide, whether I am to consider you as a daughter of Israel, and as such, *my* daughter, or an accursed Nazarene, the child of perdition, and an alien for ever, from the holy

nation, and your family!' . . . [T]o give up her faith was quite impossible, and tears of indescribable agony fell from [Emma's] eyes, as she besought from above, strength and submission, to meet the impending trial, and endure its inevitable consequences" (Bristow I. 138-139). By constructing a narrative that depicts the unwavering secret devotion of a "Jewess" to Christianity (a reversal of Jewish secret devotion to Judaism under medieval persecution), Bristow reinforces the strength of the Christian mission because she puts "the Jew" in the role of persecutor. She suggests, particularly to a Christian reading public, that good Christians need to nurture Jews, provide them with sympathy and tenderness and "save" them from the misery of their faith.[2] Emma's narrative ultimately ends "positively;" she goes on to marry a Christian gentleman and they live "happily ever after" even though she is rejected by her Jewish family. Such a conclusion further bolsters conversionist claims that Jews need not fear the fatal consequences of "the myth." Rather, Emma's story empowers ostensible Jews with the support system they need to reveal their true identity and thus reap their rewards as Christians.

Many of the novels written by authors like Bristow often exhibited sympathetic delineations of Jews to secure their conversion. Recounting their own experiences of "being saved" by Christianity, converted Jews contributed to the genre too.[3] Some even perpetuated overtly anti-Jewish stereotypes and entirely false accounts of Jewish witchery and cult-like behaviors in their narratives as well. One such convert fervently writes of these practices in an 1840 article for *The London*

Times, confirming the "mystery" of "The Hebrews, The Blood that They Take From Christians, And The Use That They Make Of It." "By the grace of God," writes the anonymous author, "I have received holy baptism, and adopted the angelic form of a monastic life, despising the haughty and unclean Jews—I, who have been one of their rabbis, and know their mysteries, which I have preserved to the very moment of receiving holy baptism, but which now I despise—I, for the benefit of Christianity, now publish these mysteries. . . . which the Jews perform with the blood of Christians." The author reveals what he calls the "truth" behind the blood libel and the barbaric rituals practiced by "the man-hating and Christ-hating Jews."[4] Even though authors like "anonymous" and Amelia Bristow formed a strong foundation for the conversionist mission to the Jews, they were not alone culpable for perpetuating contrived narratives of Jewish life and culture. The missionary effort and centuries of prejudice against Jews also impacted Christian authors whose fictional works were not necessarily written for conversionist purposes; authors with benevolent intentions could not help but transmit prejudice even when their goal was to raise awareness and sympathy on behalf of the Jewish plight. Berenice Montenero's "secret Christianity," revealed at the end of Maria Edgeworth's *Harrington*, is a good example: "Berenice is not a Jewess," admits Mr. Montenero; "her mother was a Christian . . . Berenice has been bred in her faith—a Christian—a Protestant" (254). The revelation that Berenice is indeed a Christian simplifies a central conflict in the novel—her Christian suitor, Harrington, can now marry her

without suffering public or familial ostracism and he no longer risks losing his inheritance; he is also rewarded, in a sense, for overcoming his childhood fear of "the Jew." It is an admission, however, that strips the novel of the very sympathy Edgeworth claims she wants to convey. Instead of making a "reparation," as Edgeworth had hoped, Berenice's "secret Christianity" becomes yet another instance, as Ragussis and others have also noted, in which Jewish identity is patronized, Jewish identity is exiled, and conversion is successful.[5] Like the conclusion of many of the novels in the genre, Berenice's "conversion" promotes the Christian ideal as the only possible happy ending.

Sir Walter Scott's Rebecca of *Ivanhoe* occupies a similar position in that though she does not convert: "I may not change the faith of my fathers like a garment unsuited to the climate in which I seek to dwell" (400), she nevertheless must flee England for protection: "The people of England are a fierce race, quarreling ever with their neighbors or among themselves, and ever ready to plunge the sword into the bowels of each other. Such is no safe abode for the children of my people. . . . Not in a land . . . surrounded by hostile neighbors . . . can Israel hope to rest during her wanderings" (399). Though set during the Crusades, Scott paints a strong Anglo-Jewish woman in Rebecca, the narrative reinforces that Jews cannot thrive in England as Jews. Scott also recasts Shakespeare's stereotyped money-lender and usurer, Shylock, as Rebecca's father Isaac. Though more sympathetically sketched, Scott's Isaac nevertheless suffers contradictory feelings for

his love of money and his desire to free Rebecca from her captors as he "negociat[es] his daughter's redemption" (301). Though he claims he would give all the wealth that was his to free his Rebecca, Isaac still "think[s] of his worldly goods, the love of which, by dint of inveterate habit, contended even with his parental affection" (287). When an amount is finally settled on for Rebecca's freedom, Isaac insists that unless she is returned "in safety and honour, as when taken from me" the sum he has allocated is "otherwise no bargain" (289). Isaac might be a less abrasive Shylock, but he is a Shylock nonetheless as he grapples with his central dilemma. Like Shylock, he must decide between his ducats or his daughter, or in Isaac's case, his zecchins or his daughter (287).

In order to lay the proper foundation for the nineteenth century Anglo-Jewish home, Aguilar saw addressing the problem of conversionist literature as an imperative step that must be taken before she could directly address contemporary Judaism and Jewish life in England. Both her novels and non-fiction prose reinforce her belief that philo-Semitic efforts, including the conversionist novel, were just as dangerous as overt violence, intolerance, and persecution: "decided evil, nationally speaking . . . is better than negative good" (*The Jewish Faith* 13). Faking acceptance in the hope of forcing conversion through kindness and sympathy is perhaps far more dangerous than direct knowledge of the enemy. Aguilar, in fact, draws vivid parallels between the violent Jewish persecution of the past and the more current struggle against the philo-Semitism of her own time. In the *Jewish Faith* she asks:

> what could have sustained us in the mental and bodily sufferings of the countless victims of hate and persecution? What could have upheld us at the stake, or bade us endure famine, torture, heart-crushing agony in seeing beloved ones droop, and suffer, and die, without the power of saving them, when one word of retraction would have given us life, and honour, and temporal peace? Every religion has had its martyrs, but none like the Jews. None have been such marked victims of every clime and every age; liable even now, in this era of freedom and enlightenment, to crushing degradation, physical torture, we need a spirit of endurance far more than any other race on the face of the globe. (417)

In *The Women of Israel* Aguilar further explains that "in but too many parts of the world, the Israelites are still the subjects of scorn, hatred, and persecution; and their condition is, in consequence, the lowest and most awfully degraded in the scale of man. . . . yet even here, where mind, principle, honour, all seem overthrown from such brutalising [sic] influence, the affections retain their power" (4). Certain, however, that like their ancestors, nineteenth century Jews had the strength to rise above persecution and conversionist ideology, Aguilar insists that even though "nations and dynasties, conquerors and conquered, are swept from the face of the earth, leaving not a trace; . . . the persecuted, the oppressed, the tortured, the only nation which has seen millions and millions fall by the destroying sword, and in later times, beheld but too many lost by smoother, but even more dangerous means;—that nation still lives, breathes, unchanged, its ranks undiminished, its undying vitality seeming to receive increase of strength and firmness from every blow that seeks its downfall" (549). In Aguilar's estimation, Jews survived medieval torture and abuses and will survive the smoother, though no less dangerous, persecution of philo-Semitism as well. Thus, in conveying pleas for Judaism

specifically, as well as promoting toleration and integration more generally, Aguilar produces a body of fiction that responds to the unsavory tactics of conversionists and works toward solving the problem of Jewish "homelessness"— physical, emotional, and spiritual.

Though addressed to some degree in all of her works (and seemingly overlooked by the majority of critics), Aguilar's motivation and further purpose as an author and a Jewish woman is most poignantly summarized in her 1845 *The Women of Israel*. I include it here in its entirety:

> [For] many terrible years . . . misery and oppression . . . gathered round the hapless Israelites in every land, and so crushed all mental and social elevation, so confined the sphere of action and employment, so banished all religious instruction, except such as could be imparted in the deepest secresy, that the word "Jew" became and has continued synonymous with all that is debased—with a bowed, and bowing servility, with exacting usury, with hard exclusiveness, and with merciless hatred of all mankind, and a detestation of every religion but his own. Ay, even now, to those who have never associated with us, whose only knowledge is drawn from books—whose authors . . . seem to delight in fabling us as the Shylock of Shakespeare, the old clothesman of nursery tales (noticed thus even by Miss Edgeworth), or as the money-lenders, interest-exactors, and dishonorable adepts in all the grades of usury which abound in fashionable novels. And little, perhaps, do their writers know that their fictions demonstrate far more clearly the consequences of persecution, which their ancestors have hurled upon us, than the real character of the Jew, or the true spirit of his creed. Writers who know us not, depict us, not what we *are*, but what lingering prejudice creates us, entirely forgetting the *real cause* of our fallen state—the impossibility of our attaining to that elevated social state which freedom and peace have granted to other lands, while bent to the very earth, and for ever such oppressions as even slavery does not know. The mischief which is done by such false pictures of the Jewish character in social and domestic life is incalculable. It not only fosters prejudice and confirms ignorance in our opponents, but actually causes many Jews themselves to tremble at the term, and they endeavour to conceal a faith and descent which should be their glory. Even those domestic narrations which portray some members of a Jewish family in favourable

> light, that they may conclude by making them Christians, and the other members as so stern, harsh, and oppressive, that they bear no resemblance whatever to any Israelite, except the Israelite of a Gentile's imagination—do but swell the catalogue of dangerous because false works; and never fail to impress the minds of Christian readers with the unalterable conviction, that whenever spirituality, amiability and gentleness, kindliness and love, are inmates of a Hebrew heart, it is an unanswerable proof that that heart is verging on Christianity, and will very speedily embrace that faith. (552-553)

As is evident, Aguilar was painfully aware of the damage conversionist writings were doing to both the Jewish and Christian readership in nineteenth century England. Their "fictions" about Jews zealously perpetuated the sense of Jewish homelessness by encouraging negative stereotypes and altering the reality of Jewish history in order to secure conversion. Further, directly addressing writers who reinforced the negative stereotype of the "money-hungry Jew," Aguilar explains:

> Accused as we have so often been of love of gold above all other love—of seeking, by honorable or dishonorable means to increase our worldly stores—of grasping and rapacious dispositions—let us point to this simple line, 'On the spoil laid they not their hand;' and the charge is at once proved false! Let us look back on this—on a hundred other similar traits in our history—and our national character will stand forward as free from such ignominious stain as any other nation in the world. What, if our modern history seem to contradict this, and the sneerer and scoffer point to the usurers of the middle ages, and dilating on the wealth, their rapacity (so called), their grasping minds and hardened hearts, in such opprobrious colours portray the Jew? What, if they do this? They prove nothing—nothing to tarnish the national character of the Hebrew, as proved in the momentous records of the past, and confirmed by their giving up all of wealth and greatness, rather than their religion, in their expulsion from Spain,—but much, much against themselves, in the fearful effects of persecution and intolerance, which they have hurled upon the People of the Lord. (*Women of Israel* 360-361)

Aguilar began counteracting these and other misrepresentations of Jews and Judaism in response to conversionist authors like Amelia Bristow, Christian writers like

Walter Scott and Maria Edgeworth, and converted Jews like the anonymous rabbi, who depicted their vision of Jewish life and character both historically in England, as well as abroad. Bristow, for example, fashions a heroine who embodies the Christian mission: Emma is weak, confused, and easily swayed from her Jewish faith in favor of the "strength" of Christianity. Aguilar has little patience for these contrived tales and directly addresses Bristow in a poignant moment in the *Women of Israel*: "This extraordinary misconception [of the English writer's delineation of the Jews] . . . was never more clearly marked than in the works entitled 'Sophia and Emma de Lissau, a fiction of the Jews, of the nineteenth century;' where, placing the scene in England and in the present era, the author gives an imaginary picture . . . containing not the very smallest resemblance to *English Jewish* life at any time" (558). Further, in an 1845 letter to her American correspondent Miriam Moses Cohen, Aguilar urges that we not be

> too severe in [our] opinion of Miss Edgeworth's sentiment toward the Jews—She had no opportunity of either knowing, associating with, or hearing of us but as the very lowest of the low, degraded alike in mind and character. . . . Remember too when she wrote . . . prejudice against respectable Jews was strong . . . we cannot wonder, tho' we may regret, that she should have pourtrayed us as she did. It was from an ignorance of our religion, and our families, which, could she have ever associated with us, I am convinced she would have regretted, as much as ourselves—It is to remove this ignorance concerning us . . . that is one of my principal aims in writing and I am truly thankful to say, that in more than one instance—I have been able to remove prejudice and create love. (102-103)

In addition to stating her conception of herself as an educator in these passages, Aguilar also reveals what is wrong with much gentile writing about Jews, Judaism,

and Jewish culture, that is, ignorance of Jewish experience and inherent prejudice. As a result, explains Aguilar, writers like Edgeworth and Scott (and later in the century Trollope, Dickens and Eliot), convey "false portraits of the Jewish character. . . . They think a Jew must be different to his fellows, and so call him from the Past, when oppression forced upon him a particular character, and place him in the Present, where he looks about as much out of place, as a mail-clad baron and his rude-mannered suite would seem in the luxurious and refined assemblage of England's present peers" (*Women of Israel* 554). While she respects Scott and Edgeworth as authors,[6] she nevertheless also criticizes their (in)ability to depict contemporary Jewish life or Jewish history truthfully and realistically in their stories, regardless of their good intentions. Their "gentile" perspectives, no matter how well-meaning and sincere, could not help but be anchored by the inherent prejudice, exaggerated stereotypes and general (mis)beliefs about Jews that had been woven into the very fabric of English social consciousness for centuries. Even amongst the most liberal-minded and liberally educated of Christians, explains an anonymous sympathizer in his letter to the *Jewish Chronicle*, existed this very kind of inherent prejudice:

> Born and educated in the Catholic religion, but lacking any of the prejudices which almost necessarily attach . . . I have looked on the Jews and their form of worship with perhaps a less prejudiced eye than many of my co-religionists. At the same time I am free to confess, that, at one period, I could not altogether divest myself of many early impressions, which, to say the least of them, where [sic] not calculated to enhance Judaism in my mind. . . . I am happy to say, that I have been placed in a position which truly

> enables me to judge of the falsehoods, the calumnies, and the vituperation cast—most grossly cast—on [Jews]. . . . I have had what is called a liberal education, and yet I am sorry to say that, amongst liberally-educated people, a strong (but I do not know for what reason) prejudice exists against the Jews. . . . I speak irrespective of religious doctrines; but sorry am I to find that many of my own religious belief, and many of those who differ from me in Christian form and worship, cannot bear to hear a Jew spoken well of. I thank God I am not one of these; and whenever and wherever I hear a Jew spoken ill of, for no other reason than because the man is a Jew, I, for one, will not suffer it to pass without proper rebuke.[7]

How could conversionists like Bristow and authors like Edgeworth and Scott objectively, much less sympathetically, write about Jews when everything they knew, had been taught and subsequently believed, even if publically professed otherwise, was influenced by similar prejudices?

Edgeworth herself is unaware of her overt prejudice toward Jews until Rachel Mordecai brings it to her attention;[8] and, even after her attempt "to make all the atonement and reparation" (qtd in MacDonald 8) with the publication of *Harrington*, she could not explain why she "[made] Berenice turn out to be a Christian" (23). As Judith Page rightly notes in *Imperfect Sympathies*, though Edgeworth "develops a gallery of good Jews . . . and exposes some very unattractive Christians, she also tries to keep Judaism within the bounds of general Christian charity and toleration. She does not advocate religious relativism, a world in which Judaism is on equal footing with Christianity; rather, her emphasis is on religious tolerance practiced from a position of power. . . . [Edgeworth] advocates the Christian Protestant position as culturally correct and unifying, even if its proponents

are sometimes violent and bigoted . . . and . . . long-standing anti-Semit[es]" (141). Berenice's Christianity is the only element of the narrative that disappoints Rachel Mordecai, while it is the only salvageable part for Walter Scott: "I own I breathed more freely when I found Miss Montenero was not an actual Jewess" (*Letters* 4. 478). Even though Scott writes a Jewish heroine that does not convert to Christianity, he nevertheless reveals his own deep seated prejudice here, as well as in *Ivanhoe* when he makes clear that there is no room for Rebecca or her father, as long as they remain Jews, in England; in order to thrive, she and Isaac must flee. As Aguilar explains, these delineations of "the Jew" provided little in their poor, and often false, characterizations with which readers could identify. Thus, the tales only further reinforced the need for conversion, rather than integration:

> English writers, when they introduce the nation . . . overlook the Jewish inmates of their own land . . . and as the picture they draw is necessarily quite distinct from their own manners and customs, they believe themselves, and make others believe, that is a perfect portrait of the Jew, whereas it is in fact nothing more or less the delineation of the Spaniard, or Pole, or German, who might just as correctly be of the Gentile as of the Jewish creed. To draw the Jew correctly, then, not his present condition, but the annals of the past, must provide materials. (*Women f Israel* 558)

Aguilar uses her own literary platform to combat these misrepresentations of and attacks against Jews. Her fictional narratives take back and recast what conversionists appropriated and essentially destroyed:

> there are so very few works relative to our history in the vernacular idiom, and still fewer in which the Hebrew himself comes forward with an attempt to fill up the void in national literature, and give the youth of his nation some assistance, distinct from the peculiar tenets which must pervade the writings

> of the most liberal of other creeds; *we* trust, that to linger a little while on our general history and thus explain away some of the errors and prejudices which have unconsciously gathered round us from *unanswered* accusations, may not be considered unnecessary, or even irrelevant. (*Women of Israel* 376)

In her stories Aguilar refutes the inaccurate portraits of Jewish life conversionists peddled: Jewish women's weakness and malleability; their need to be "saved" and liberated from the oppressive nature of their faith; the overbearing and contentious relationships between fathers and daughters; and the ultimate desire to convert and thus reveal their secret devotion to Christianity. Jewish men are not the Shylock of Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice*, nor are Jewish daughters hateful of their fathers and their religion in favor of Christian suitors and conversion like Jessica. Further, in Aguilar's tales Jews flee *to*, rather than *from*, England for protection and safe harbor; in her later Anglo-Jewish domestic narratives like *The Perez Family*, Aguilar refutes the re-imagined blood libel or the "myth of conversion" we see so zealously portrayed in *Emma de Lissau*.

In responding to Jewish representations in this way, Aguilar becomes somewhat difficult to categorize because she uses only the parts and pieces of literary genres and traditions that further her cause. Michael Galchinsky explains that "Aguilar's writing does not fit neatly into typical historical or critical models for approaching the Victorian period" (*Selected Writings* 45). Yet modern scholars, including Galchinsky, argue that her historical romances are re-writings of Walter Scott's tales. Aguilar's own contemporary reviewers make a similar connection, as

this unsigned review exemplifies: "Sir Walter Scott's name as an author would not have been disgraced . . . had it appeared on the title-page instead of Grace Aguilar."[9] Aguilar certainly has Walter Scott's Rebecca in mind when she writes Marie Morales's story in *The Vale of Cedars*. Furthermore, Aguilar's historical fictions (as well as her domestic tales) work on several levels, and from multiple narrative genres, to address a wide-range of readers. This technique suggests a narrative complexity that not only "re-writes" history from a Jewish perspective, but further attempts to re-define how a country understands that history. Aguilar wants to shift the dialogue from concern with conversion of the Jews and religious homogeneity to integration of Jews with their "Christian brethren" for a stronger, unified nation.

Further, this narrative technique becomes particularly significant when thinking about Aguilar's goals and the tools she claimed were desperately needed in order to be successful:

> We want Jewish writers, Jewish books. Prejudices never can be removed, till the bright undying ray of knowledge flashes over the world, dispersing the mists of ignorance which centuries of hate and persecution . . . have accumulated, and this ray . . . must wing its way from North to South, and from East to West, through the silent yet eloquent minister, the press; and then there may be hope and justice for the Jew. There is none now, and the fault is our own! We make no effort to enlighten our neighbors as to the true spirit of the hope that is in us, though no struggle is too great to obtain a proper position and estimation in the Christian world. . . . [I]t is not enough to make the *Jew* respected, but to have JUDAISM rightly reverenced: and to do this, there must be a JEWISH LITERATURE, or the Jewish people will not advance one step. (*Jewish Faith* 264-265)

While Aguilar's larger goal of establishing a Jewish home in England involved creating the essential tools needed for the undertaking, her claims regarding the non-existence of Jewish texts are not entirely true.[10] In 1826 (Aguilar was ten) the Hebrew scholar Hyman Hurwitz published the first collection of Hebrew stories, *Hebrew Tales; Selected and Translated from the Writings of the Ancient Hebrew Sages: To Which is Prefixed, and Essay, on the Uninspired Literature of the Hebrews*. As Judith Page explains, Hurwitz published the tales in order to "counter negative and uninformed assumptions about [rabbinic] literature in Christian writing. Fundamentally, he wanted to show the compatibility of traditional Jewish wisdom and contemporary British culture. . . . Hurwitz set out to . . . cultivate a new tradition that would make Jews more at home in Britain and Britain more hospitable to Jews and Jewish culture" (82). Having read, and no doubt having been influenced by, the tales (she briefly cites and praises them in *The Women of Israel*[11]) Aguilar remained unsatisfied. Whereas Hurwitz translated Talmudic stories in his attempt to integrate Christians and Jews, Aguilar was the first to fictionalize a thriving Anglo-Jewish family in her 1843 *The Perez Family*. Aguilar calls for a "Jewish literature" that promotes her Anglo-Jewish vision for nineteenth century British Jews and epitomizes the Anglo-Jewish family. This kind of "literature" did not exist. Even though Page admits that she gives Maria Edgeworth "more credit than some for being the first British author to devote an entire work to the attempt [of showing "real" Jews at home in Britain]," she nevertheless suggests that

Edgeworth does "for the novel what Hurwitz achieved in the mixed form of preface and translated tales" (136). While Edgeworth might have been the first to make the attempt, her effort fails. As I develop more fully throughout chapters three and four, it is Grace Aguilar who picks up the Anglo-Jewish cause that Edgeworth abandons when she succumbs to philo-Semitic literary conventions in her decision to convert Berenice Montenero; and it is Aguilar, in her quest for a Jewish home, who does for the Jewish novel what Hurwitz did for the preface and tales.

As Hall notes in her *Pilgrimage* (1851), Aguilar "was a golden link between the Christians and the Jews; respected and admired alike by both, she drew each in charity closer to the other; she was a proof, living and illustrious, of Jewish excellence and Jewish liberality, and loyalty, and intelligence. The sling of the son of Jesse was not wielded with more power and effect against the scorner of his people, than was her pen against the giant Prejudice" (458). Hall's metaphor is an important one. Aguilar's marginalization as both a woman and a Jew may ostensibly limit her action, but she is nevertheless able to wield her pen in defense of Jews "against the scorner of [her] people."

The Safest and Wisest Path for Female Writers

While it was for her domestic fiction and historical romances—*The Vale of Cedars*, *Records of Israel*, *Home Influence*, *Mother's Recompense*, *Women's Friendship*, *The Days of Bruce*, *The Women of Israel*, *The Perez Family*—that Aguilar garnered the most fame, the novel is not where her public literary career began. At just twelve years old she wrote "Gustavas Vasa," a drama that was never published and is now lost;[12] at nineteen she anonymously published a book of poetry, *The Magic Wreath of Hidden Flowers*; and at twenty-two she translated *Israel Defended*, Don Isaac Orobio de Castro's controversial text defending the Jewish interpretation of the scriptures.[13] During this time Aguilar was also working on multiple book manuscripts, including what was to become one of her most overtly doctrinal pieces, the *Spirit of Judaism*. Aguilar labored over *Spirit* for years because the original manuscript (1839) was lost in transit to the American rabbi Isaac Leeser for publication. After being rewritten from notes, *Spirit of Judaism* was eventually published in 1842.[14]

Though Aguilar's project regarding Jews and Judaism never wavered, her mode of disseminating that message did shift early on from a direct and sometimes preachy doctrinal type of commentary—on Judaism, conversion, women's responsibilities, and distinctions between religion, creed, and spirit—to a more indirect and narrative method via the novel and short story. Beth Abraham-Lask, in "Grace Aguilar: A Centenary Tribute," and Cynthia Scheinberg, in *Women's Poetry*

and Religion in Victorian England: Jewish Identity and Christian Culture, have both suggested that even though the *Spirit of Judaism* "established Grace Aguilar's reputation among Jews and non-Jews," and even though it was "the first work from her pen[15] and one of the earliest Anglo-Jewish works of the kind" (Lask 141), her motivation for this shift resulted from a combination of Isaac Leeser's unapproved editorial insertions peppered throughout the published edition and Jacob Franklin's 1842 review in *The Voice of Jacob*:

> [*Spirit of Judaism's*] best apology is the frequent notes of [the] editor; a series of comments and corrections, forced upon him by the necessity of counteracting the erroneous impressions which the text would else produce on the ordinary reader. The deeper research, the wider, experience, and, therefore, sounder judgment of the Rev. Editor, impels him to break through the stricter line usually observed, with an author's concurrence, and to protect his own reputation, by frequent protests against the views he helps to disseminate. . . . No offence can be reasonably entertained at the institution of a comparison between the qualification of an editor, thus elected by herself, and the author from whom he differs. A lady, and that too young a lady, whatever the advantages of quick perception conceded to her sex, is, by the iron rule of custom, limited to fewer opportunities of acquiring that information and experience, which might restrict a too apt disposition to generalize from few facts. (qtd in Galchinsky 365-366)

Franklin patronizes Aguilar in his suggestion that as a "lady," and "too young a lady" at that, she could neither know nor comprehend the intricacies of Judaism itself—law or religious practice—deeply enough to convey any real kind of spiritual or religious message. Though Franklin might have been relieved that a better educated, more capable, *man* was able to curb "the enthusiasm of the [lady] author" and fortunately "counteract[ ] the erroneous impressions which the text would else

produce," Aguilar, not aware of Leeser's editorial remarks until after *Spirit's* publication, was frustrated, angry, and disheartened by these responses.

By placing his Editor's Preface before hers, Leeser skews both the reader's interpretation of Aguilar's text and her message from the very beginning. Further, Leeser's lengthy editorial insertions and "corrections" often convey (if not directly state at times) an attitude similar to Franklin's. Leeser does, however, praise *Spirit* in his belief that both male and female readers will be

> refreshed and invigorated by a new feeling of religious hopefulness called forth by the pious aspirations which are scattered throughout these pages . . . seeing, as they must do, that the argument so strongly brought home to the judgement of all is not furnished by a man PAID to *preach* our doctrines, but by a woman whose own experience has taught her the blessedness and life springing from the living fountain of the code of Moses. (6)

Despite this initial praise, Leeser calls into question his "gifted daughter of Israel" whose "voluntary testimony," he claims, "is worth much more than a highly elaborate treatise by one deeply learned in the law . . . despite . . . occasional errors, which are for the most part animadverted upon the notes appended" (6). Leeser's "notes appended" allow no more than a page or two of Aguilar's text to pass without the addition of his own lengthy "animadversion": "Miss Aguilar has in the above failed to convey her thoughts as clearly as they might have been," or "Miss A probably means," or "Without dissenting entirely from this view (and as editor I am not called upon to state in every passage whether I agree with the author or not), I will merely remark that," or "I am not permitted to alter the text so as to destroy the

meaning; or else I should certainly have altered this sentence," accompany various passages.[16] Though he may not be "permitted" to alter Aguilar's text directly, Leeser does so often and his notes, often one–two full pages in length on their own, become at the very least distracting for the reader because they detract from the author's text. Leeser's notes undermine Aguilar's arguments as they rephrase, correct, and indeed "alter" the text to convey what Leeser *thinks* himself, or what he *thinks* Aguilar meant to say. Of course, these addenda leave readers questioning whether Leeser really viewed Aguilar's contribution in *Spirit*, as he wrote in his introductory remarks, as "worth much more than a highly elaborate treatise by one deeply learned in the law"? I cannot help but wonder if Leeser would have questioned and heavily edited a man "deeply learned in the law" in the same way he does this "gifted daughter of Israel." Lask suggests that the two voices (Aguilar's and Leeser's) in the *Spirit of Judaism* "make it all the easier for us to observe Grace Aguilar's straining at the leash of traditional Rabbinical Judaism with Leeser pulling her back time and again" (142). In plain English, Lask observes, "that would mean, angels rush in where scholars tread gingerly" (143). As a woman—and therefore in Leeser and Franklin's assessment neither rabbi nor scholar—Aguilar's effort to create an overt theological project was criticized. *Spirit* is an exegesis of the Shema,[17] the proclamation of Jewish monotheism that comes directly from the Hebrew Bible. Though *Spirit* "makes generic claims to "theology" in its most traditional sense" (147), Scheinberg

explains, after Franklin's review Aguilar never published in so conventionally doctrinal or overtly theological form again.

Although Aguilar did continue to write prayers and interpret biblical passages throughout her life, the effect of Leeser's and Franklin's comments resonate in her conscious decision to keep these texts from public circulation: "I dare not publish such a volume, as Miss Gratz describes . . . my Spirit of Judaism [was] by many violently condemned . . . greeted with both hinted and expressed disbelief in my capacity to write it, my dreadful presumption, to attempt it because as a Woman I could know nothing on the subject—what would such kind encouragers say, did I issue a book of prayer!" (98).[18] Aguilar reveals her ire throughout her response to the request by the American Rebecca Gratz and Gratz's niece Miriam Moses Cohen that she publish her prayers and religious writings. The effect of Leeser's and Franklin's criticism is perhaps most poignantly conveyed, however, in Aguilar's 1842 letter to Isaac D'Israeli. In the letter Aguilar expresses her desire to publish works "of a very different nature"[19] and references the "simple domestic Tale of 3 vols."[20] on which she was working. The volumes "ha[d] nothing to do with Judaism—or with creeds—being but a Tale of English Life.—I have written as a woman for women, deeming that the safest and wisest path for female writers." Aguilar never mentions Franklin or Leeser directly; however, it is hard to imagine her not having them in mind here. Aguilar did not cease to write about Jews, Judaism, and Jewish life at the time; on the contrary, it appears her motivations only strengthened as she

developed as an author. But she chooses temporarily to travel a *safer* and *wiser* path and dramatically alters the way she treats her subjects. Though she refrained from publishing overtly doctrinal and religiously focused texts just after *Spirit's* review, Aguilar does not stop writing them nor does she lose sight of her goals for Anglo-Jewry.

While Aguilar refused to subject herself to such criticism again, after Aguilar's death, her mother published her personal prayers, meditations, and religious commentaries and sermons in two collections, *Sabbath Thoughts and Sacred Communings* (1853) and *Essays and Miscellanies: Choice Cullings From the Manuscripts of Grace Aguilar* (1853). In an 1851 letter to Miriam's husband Solomon Cohen, four years after Grace's death, Sarah Aguilar reveals her own indecision regarding the collection's publication and faults the criticism of Franklin, Leeser, and others for being one of the decisive factors to influence what turned out to be a significant shift in her daughter's choice of literary expression:

> Have I any right can I be justified, [sic] thus to publish my Daughter's private thoughts and prayers, which were written solely for her own use. . . . ought I to bring them before the Public[?] [W]hen requested to compose and publish prayers for individual use my sweet child refused, she had not courage to comply, being aware that by many persons she had been considered presumtuous [sic], for writing at all on religious subjects that as a woman, and a very young one she could know little or nothing on the subject, and <u>one</u> individual told her Father that he <u>could</u> not purchase a copy . . . unless it were read and corrected by some man tho' he did [not] say who—<u>that</u> my child would not allow, saying that nothing should go forth to the world hers unless she could boldly and fearlessly write as she <u>felt and thought</u>.[21]

Sarah Aguilar's hesitation regarding the publication of these more overtly religious and doctrinal reflections is further reinforced by her decision first to release her daughter's unpublished novels and short stories. Published posthumously for the first time were Aguilar's domestic, secular, novels *Home Influence* (1847), *Women's Friendship* (1850), and *Mother's Recompense* (1851), as well as her Jewish historical romance *The Vale of Cedars* (1850). These were followed by her Scottish tale *The Days of Bruce* (1852), the historical novel *Edmund and Wallace* (1852)[22] and *Home Scenes and Heart Studies* (1852), a collection of Jewish, non-Jewish, and religiously ambiguous short stories, some of which had been published in monthly magazines like *Keepsake* and *La Belle Assemblee* during Grace's lifetime. After these tales had garnered further acclaim, Sarah Aguilar published her daughter's *Sabbath Thoughts* and *Essays and Miscellanies*, but not without trepidation.

It is clear that both Franklin's review and Leeser's extended editorial commentaries had a profound influence on the choices Aguilar made regarding the means she would use to forward her position. However, unlike Lask, Scheinberg, and even Sarah Aguilar, I suggest that though Franklin's and Leeser's criticism disheartened her, Aguilar was not dissuaded, but empowered. She realized that in order to change the position and estimation of Jews in nineteenth century England effectively, and in order to be taken seriously while doing so, she would have to set about creating "sympathy and love" in the hearts of her "Christian neighbors" in a less direct, less threatening way—for both the Jewish male ego and Christian readers.

As Galchinsky explains, she "was the only Anglo-Jewish woman writer who explicitly embraced the restrictions on women's public notoriety, and simultaneously took full credit for her work" (*Origins* 160). Aguilar does not back down from her position; rather, she discovers early on that the novel was one of the few literary forms that would enable her to "write as she felt and thought" without editorial revisions or patronizing reviews criticizing her "knowledge" (and thus counteracting her efforts) or ability to understand religious texts because of her gender.[23] In the novel and short story Aguilar finds her writer's home; it becomes the medium she will come to rely on to pave the inroad to the British national home she had envisioned for Jews.

Newly inspired to follow "the safest and wisest path for female writers," what results from Aguilar's pen is a body of work that actively "writes" and "rights" the Jewish home as she knew it. Aguilar's literary tactics raise an important question: what is narratable? Specifically, what is narratable[24] for a Jewish woman with an agenda such as Aguilar's? With what can and will Christian and Jewish readers sympathize so that the fiction will have the desired effect? In other words, what can Aguilar *write* so she can *right* the imbalance she sees in the relationship between British Jews and non-Jews? Aguilar began writing historical romances as early as 1830 and continued working in the genre through the early 1840s. Galchinsky argues that at this time Aguilar "began to turn toward domestic fiction" because "[she] found that historical romance distanced English readers from Jews. On the other hand, her earliest domestic fiction such as *Home Influence* and 'The Authoress,'

were studiously written about Christian characters, as though Aguilar felt it too dangerous to write about present-day Jews" (26).[25] Galchinsky raises an interesting point here and notes Aguilar's move toward a different genre and style; yet, I disagree with his conclusion. Aguilar does not fear writing about present-day Jews, nor did a potential "danger" motivate her choice of genre; she does not seem as malleable or naively innocent to warrant either. Rather than allow social constructs to dictate how and what she would write about regarding Jews and Judaism, Aguilar used those socially acceptable determinants to her advantage in her attempt to reshape what and how the construct itself thought about Jews. As Galchinsky implies, what Aguilar wrote about and when she wrote is important, but there is a significant complexity behind those decisions. Abram S. Isaacs's fictional (albeit somewhat biographical) account of Aguilar, *The Young Champion: One Year in Grace Aguilar's Life* (1913), captures this complexity and the conviction with which Aguilar worked and lived:

> I wish to become a writer, and my writings I want to teach as well as entertain. My home has been so happy and my parents so loving that I should like to write books that would brighten other lives and make other homes as happy. . . . and I have another aim in life. . . . I want to prove the Jewess is no witch, and I desire that the world honor her for all she has been . . . . [the] English . . . reared in an intelligent Christian home, have not entirely lost a certain feeling of prejudice, due wholly to ignorance. And I would write to destroy that ignorance. The Jewess was the pioneer in all that makes for home and religion. She was a princess like Sarah, a leader like Deborah, a queen like Esther, a noble daughter like Ruth, a tender mother like Hannah. If to-day she is hunted down in lands that claim to be civilized, they who block her path toward advancement are the witches. She is helpless and innocent. . . . I have another aim—to teach the Christian and Jew to

> respect each other's creed and character. They revere the same Book, are guided by the same Ten Commandments, pray to the same Father in heaven, believe in an immortal life beyond. . . . Why then should they be unfriendly to each other? They should rather work together against those who deride all religion, and have no other thought than their own selfish enjoyment. (107-110)

The account of Aguilar's youthful aspirations, though fictional (there is no direct evidence that Aguilar ever made such a declaration at so young an age),[26] is an insightful summation of the driving issues that characterized her larger goal of securing a home for British Jewry: to use fiction to educate and thus reveal Jewish home life, to remedy the negative interpretation and depictions of the Jewess (and Jews generally), and to bridge the long-standing prejudicial gap separating Jews and Christians. Though she was only fourteen when she began writing her first novel, Aguilar's letters and journal entries, particularly her early letters to Isaac D'Israeli and her correspondence through the end of her life with Solomon and Miriam Cohen, reveal that she knew very early the road she wanted to travel. Basing his characterization on Aguilar's writings themselves, Isaacs conveys both the seriousness and deep seated convictions driving her work, as well as her romantic idealism.

As I noted above, Aguilar's letters are particularly revealing of her complexity. As she writes in 1846: "You do not indeed know me personally but believe me you know me far more truly, than many who because we often meet, <u>think</u> they know me well—I cannot write without throwing <u>heart and mind</u> upon my page—and only the electric kind of sympathy is struck, in personal intercourse. Neither mind, nor

heart dare I reveal."[27] This letter to Miriam Cohen reveals the private and guarded nature of Aguilar's own personality. The excerpt also reveals something integral to her role as an author and Jewish advocate because it speaks to why fiction can foster deep (not momentary "electric") sympathy and change the image of Jews more so than direct "personal intercourse" or overt doctrinal texts and treatises. Just as Aguilar feels she can write freely about Jews and Judaism, always mindful of her audience, and throw her "heart and mind" upon the page, readers become much more willing to sympathize beyond the superficial "electric" feelings generated by public discourse that may quickly fade away. Acutely aware of the written word's ability to effect change, Aguilar recognizes that the novel was not only a safe means by which a Jewish woman writer could connect with readers, but it was also a safe means for readers, Christians and the larger British society, to connect with Jews. Thus, the genres Aguilar chose—and even more particularly, the method and subjects she did (or did not) narrate—were as much involved in her engagement with readers as the stories themselves. Though Aguilar never compromises her beliefs, it is not beneath her to manipulate her texts (and her readers) to convey and instill those beliefs in them.

Influencing But Not Interfering: Sympathy Through Subversion In The Novel

> It has always been true that the greatest and smallest, the wisest and simplest of us yield to the spell of romance; and surely experience shows that we need not lose that spell with years. . . . Not only born story-tellers, but thinkers and teachers, use the novel as an instrument, who, but for its popularity, would never have seized it to strike at abuse, preach reform, and teach things pure, lovely, and of good report. . . . The novel has vindicated its claim . . . to educate the world in entertaining it . . . . [and] the modern novel points to its own record for its vindication . . . not only by some specific service done . . . or some reform of abuse in . . . England, France, or America, but in a vastly larger way, by its general lessons of morality, its diffused intelligence, its inspirations, its suggestions, its models laid down to copy, its pitfalls pointed out to avoid.
>
> —Philip Quilibet, "Novels and Novelists," *The Galaxy* (1869)

During the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries, government and regulation of the family became one of England's major political, social, and religious issues; the novel was an extremely popular forum to shape the "as yet ideal." Enlightenment women writers, named Enlightenment feminists by Elizabeth Bannet in *The Domestic Revolution*, wrote novels, conduct books, and domestic and religious tracts to "challenge[ ] and revise[ ] public thinking about the family, as well as the traditional patriarchal constructions of the family" (3). Enlightenment feminists successfully promoted two different, though linked, ways of securing power: Egalitarians like Mary Wollstonecraft argued for *equality* between men and women, insisting they had "equal aptitude to sense and virtue with men," while Matriarchal writers like Hannah More upheld social *hierarchy* by reinforcing "Women's Superior Excellence over Men." Though they acknowledged their "subsumed" position as women within a patriarchal society, Matriarchal writers like More insisted that even

though men may have gained power over them, women still retained their "original superiority of sense and virtue over them" (3). Breaking down the distinctions between Matriarchs and Egalitarians further, Bannet explains that while

> retaining firm belief in domestic, social, and political hierarchy and appearing more conventional then they were, Matriarchs taught ladies how to obtain and deploy their ascendency over men, over their families, and over their inferiors, which they thought were the ladies' due. Egalitarians, on the other hand, preached independence from all subordination, both at home and abroad, and sought to level the hierarchies both in the family and in the state. Matriarchs imagined a family in which the patriarchal governor of the domestic hierarchy had been surreptitiously supplanted by a wife who understood that she had but to "give the Lords of Creation the appearance of supremacy". . . . [While] Egalitarians imagined a family based on consensual relations between parents and children and husbands and wives and on division of labor between women and men who related to each other as equals and displayed equal softness and equal sense. (3-4)

What resulted was a class of women writers who used the novel "as an instrument of real power . . . to bring about material changes" (11). Anne Mellor, in *Mothers of the Nation*, similarly notes that women writers during the Romantic era "self-consciously defin[ed] themselves as the shapers of public opinion. . . . [T]hey also saw themselves as peculiarly *responsible* for defining the future direction of public policy and social reform" (9).

Aguilar, I argue, occupies a similar position. She uses fiction to challenge and revise public thinking about the Anglo-Jewish family as well as specifically conversionist constructions of "the Jew." While the majority of her works were published posthumously in the mid-nineteenth century, Aguilar started writing poetry, private journals and short stories as early as the late 1820s—at the end of the

Romantic era. These dates are significant when considering the Enlightenment feminist movement Bannet and Mellor discuss, a movement, according to Bannet, that can be traced through 1830. We know Aguilar was reading authors like Hannah More, for example, because she quotes a lengthy passage from More's *Spirit of Prayer* in her *Spirit of Judaism*.[28] In an attempt to reconcile religious identity—particularly Jewish identity—with its society, and alleviate the sense of religious homelessness within the context of the social sphere she identified in British Jewry, Aguilar draws from both the story-telling oral tradition of her crypto-Jewish heritage as well as the Matriarchal (hierarchy, convention) and Egalitarian (equality, independence) components of Enlightenment feminism.

Bannet explains that the novel became "a vehicle of public instruction" (57) and enabled women like Wollstonecraft and More "to construct for themselves a public role as moralists and social reformers. . . . [T]hey could work for whichever 'revolution in female manners' they sought by impressing upon their readers the truth, desirability, and practical benefits of their own domestic agendas and politico-feminist philosophies" (57). But whereas Enlightenment feminism worked strictly on behalf of white, European (generally English), female positions of power, Aguilar employs similar tactics to forward her own agenda. That Jewish women were indeed powerful and influential, Aguilar had already determined; she focuses her attention on inspiring Jewish women to use that power (and instructing them *how* to use that power) to guide the Jewish family and to improve the position of Jews socially.

Novels and short stories become Aguilar's most effective instruments because, as Elizabeth Langland explains in *Telling Tales: Gender and Narrative Form in Victorian Literature*, they "engage us because of the relationship they purport to establish with . . . material reality. Their poetics is deeply involved with their politics . . . their values and investments. *How* something is represented relates intimately to *what* is represented and *why*" (xv). The nature of the Enlightenment feminist literary tradition provided Aguilar with the tools she needed to address an otherwise contentious (and to some degree unaddressable) issue and enabled her to exercise her own powers of influence to engage readers ("their values and investments") with her concerns for British Jewry.

What places Aguilar and her narrative voice most concretely within the Enlightenment feminist tradition, then, are the ways she executed her agenda for England's Jewish population and, ironically, her support of patriarchal ideology. At the same time that she reinforces women's superiority Aguilar also insists that women not "desire to grasp *something more than is her allotted portion*;—her discontent with the lowlier station . . . her mistaken notion, that humility is degradation. . . . seek humility, simply from its magic power of keeping woman in her own beautiful sphere, without one wish, one ambitious whisper, to exchange it for another" (*Women of Israel* 33-35). Within the terms of the Enlightenment feminist writers, Aguilar uses the literary devices of a tradition that relied on an intentional double-meaning. As Bannet explains, writers like Hannah More tended

to "allow the play of possible meaning arising from 'the agreement and disagreement of ideas' to exceed any moral or interpretation offered in the story. In this way, the most proper of exemplary narratives could be written double-voiced to disprove the evidence of its own example and seem more conventional than it was" (68). Even though their representations of women's "proper place" and the language of morality, religion, virtue, duty, and principle in which they spoke often "seemed not only conservative and unprogressive but blinkered unfeminist as well" (20), Enlightenment feminist writers were really quite subversive and calculating. As I discuss in the previous chapter, we see this technique used in Aguilar's questioning of England's religious devotion and it is invoked in almost every other facet of Aguilar's arguments on behalf of Jews, gender, identity, and home. She places women in positions of power to execute change, both domestically and nationally: "if she have really a great mind," Aguilar remarks in *The Women of Israel*, "she will know how to *influence* without in any way *interfering* . . . and by domestic conduct influence society at large, secretly and unsuspectedly indeed, but more powerfully than she herself can in the least degree suppose" (214). Though she appears to uphold the conventional and hierarchical separation of spheres, Aguilar challenges the construct. Because their abilities had been underestimated by the patriarchal social structure, Aguilar argues that women were more powerful than they had been aware and thus best equipped to be the shapers of the family and the nation. As Langland explains in *Nobody's Angels*, this kind of subversiveness reveals how

"effectively power may operate when its manifestations appear insignificant and inconsequential" (7-8). Women, mothers, and homes ultimately began to change society and, argues Mellor, "had an enormous—and hitherto largely uncredited—impact on the formation of public opinion in England between 1780 and 1830" (11). Rather than the public sphere "invading" and "colonizing" the private sphere, Mellor sees "the values of the private sphere associated primarily with women . . . infiltrating and finally dominating the discursive public sphere" (11). Thus, women like More and, I would add, Aguilar, assumed the role of "mother-teacher" (89)[29] and "developed a new image of the ideal female" as someone who "takes the lead in governing herself, her children, and by extension, society at large" (91).

Aguilar's narrative style relies in part on both the Matriarchal belief in hierarchy and the Egalitarian belief in equality to configure the Jewish home. Ostensibly merging these two notions seems contradictory, but Aguilar advocates for Jews on multiple levels. She argues for the social *equality* of Jews with Christians in England while championing the *hierarchical* conventionality in the home at the same time. She never challenges the primacy of the home as the appropriate and necessary focus for women's lives or Judaism. Rather, she appropriates the private domestic space of the home as woman's kingdom because it was from here that women "controlled the dissemination of certain knowledges . . . in mid-Victorian England" (Langland, *Nobody's Angels* 9). It was exactly because women were "isolated from

the realms of politics and economic production [that they] became key players in consolidating power" (9) and, in Aguilar's terms, could "influence without interfering." Aguilar's goal, suggests Cynthia Scheinberg, "is not to claim women's rights in what she sees as the problematic public space of institutionalized worship, but rather to position the private and individual as the central . . . power in Judaism" (160). While Aguilar's novels and short stories impress these sentiments on the reader subtly, her *Women of Israel* articulates the position with pressing clarity:

> [Woman's] duty is to make home happy; her mission, to *influence* man, alike in the relative duties of mother to her son, wife to her husband, sister to her brother, and in her own person, to upraise the holy cause of a religion, which, from its pure spirituality and long concealment, is by the multitude misunderstood, vilified, and charged with such false accusations as only *acts* can remove. Something more is needed for the elevation of our faith, than even making it known through books (though that may accomplish much). We must prove the superiority of our guiding law, by the superiority of our own conduct, as women of Israel, in our own houses. (570-571)

Though Aguilar clearly subscribes to the idea that men and women have different responsibilities in and out of the home, at the same time she reconfigures the boundaries of their positions within the context of educational and religious responsibilities. Like her predecessors, Aguilar places the potential for change in women's hands and renders them with real power; or, as Hannah More terms it, an "*acknowledged power*: a power wide in its extent, indefinite in its effects and inestimable in its importance" (*Strictures* 52).

Aguilar's literary repertoire—which includes poetry, short stories, historical romances, epistolary novels, domestic fiction, as well as religious and moral

guidebooks—marries the world of the novel to the world of moral and religious education. In this sense Aguilar is not unlike her contemporary Sarah Stickney Ellis. However, whereas Ellis expresses rigid adherence to set gender hierarchies and ideologies in her discussions of "woman's proper place," Aguilar never promotes women as "feeble instruments" whose sole attribute is "disinterested kindness." Nor does she insist, particularly like Ellis and other conservatives, that "woman . . . is but a meager item in the catalogue of humanity. . . . Never yet . . . was woman great . . . nor can she ever be great in herself" (Ellis, *Women of England* 381). What distinguishes Aguilar from Ellis and others is her double-vision: Aguilar positions her women as both faithful upholders of the dominant culture's gender and social hierarchies while also depicting them as strong, intelligent, guiding forces in their homes. As such, Aguilar's women are not "meager item[s] in the catalogue of humanity," they are in fact "great" and have the ability to affect change socially. Within this context, then, Aguilar's insistence that her "work should always be feminine," as she writes in an 1845 letter to Cohen (102), becomes one of her most revealing admissions as a Jewish writer. Her interpretation of what it means to be "feminine," and accordingly, what it means to be a "woman," not only sets the tone for her fiction, but also establishes the parameters for her vision for nineteenth century British Jewry. It is a definition that, while adhering to the constructs of her period's gender ideology, is first and foremost anchored in Aguilar's own understanding of women's historical role in Judaism. Certainly for Aguilar the

"feminine" is synonymous with the "home" and education. "According to our ancient father," she writes in *The Women of Israel*, "whose opinion is evidently founded on our holy law, the mission of the women of Israel is education; and this, even as in olden times, we can still accomplish" (567). Aguilar sees women as responsible for the moral, intellectual, spiritual and religious education of their families; Aguilar's women are thus powerful and influential figures both domestically and socially. Women "are not only . . . man's equal, but . . . in the depth and faithfulness of love, in the capability of *feeling* and *enduring*, in devotedness and fortitude—alike in bodily and mental trial—we are unanswerably his superior" (34-35).

Whether describing the domestic life of a Jewish family living in Victorian England, as she does in *The Perez Family*, detailing the medieval adventures of a young woman fleeing Inquisitorial persecution and living in the shadows of crypto-Judaism, as she does with Marie Morales in *The Vale of Cedars*, or recounting the life of an unmarried, gifted writer who struggles with domestic happiness, like Clara Stanley in "The Authoress," Aguilar's message remains the same throughout. Each of these tales presents the female figure as an educator, whose abilities find their greatest strength within the domestic sphere. Home is the place of power, the place to nurture or destroy the next generation. "Home is woman's appropriate shining scene" insists Aguilar in an 1844 letter to Cohen, "and that an amiable disposition and loving heart, are so much dearer in the Woman—than their superficial

accomplishments which to many make the sole end and scope of their existence. Domestic affection and duties, are not in general, brought as visibly before the young as they ought to be—it is my longing desire to represent them in all their natural beauty in whatever I write, if it is of a light or serious nature—" (98). In *whatever she writes*, Aguilar's narrative voice must remain feminine in the hope of reaching "those young aspiring minds, who, beginning to be conscious of thought and the powers of reason, turn restless and dissatisfied from the religion of tacit belief and customary form, and demand and *must have*, if indeed we would give them a ruling and consoling principle, a religion of *understanding*. They must know what they believe, and why" (*The Jewish Faith* 11).

Like her fictional Rachel Perez, Aguilar too must teach her "children" "as to render them indeed faithful to their God, meek and forgiving towards man, and invulnerable to every temptation held forth by the opposers of their faith" (*The Women of Israel* 134). Supplying her female protagonists with the necessary tools to combat prejudice and conversion and impart strength to younger generations to do the same, Aguilar is interested in the transmission of knowledge—moral education and Jewish education—and uses her own subjective understanding of the maternal role to effect this transmission through her stories. As she explains in the Preface to her popular domestic novel *Home Influence*: "Her sole aim, with regard to Religion, has been to incite a train of serious and loving thought toward God and man, especially toward those with whom He has linked us in the precious ties of parent

and child" (viii). In this way, Aguilar the author becomes an instructing parent for both her characters and her readers through her fiction.

While subversive techniques were an element of Enlightenment feminism, drawing ideal pictures in order to gain sympathy from the dominant culture was also not uncommon in texts later in the nineteenth century. According to Audrey Jaffe in *Scenes of Sympathy*, Victorian novels that address liminal segments of society—*Daniel Deronda* and *A Christmas Carol* for example—issue appeals for sympathy as "they attempt to redeem figures defined as marginal or deviant and in the process complicate the social categories and identities they seek to stabilize" (21). Figures like Jews were "positioned outside mainstream Victorian society—[and] defined . . . that society's negative image—are transformed into exemplars of cultural value, embodying ideals of universality and inviting the harmonious resolution of social conflict" (21). In other words, by identifying alienated Jewish Others with the universally accepted (English) ideal, presenting them as stock characters that Victorian readers could recognize and perhaps with which they could identify likeness, Aguilar increased the odds of sympathetic identification and thus acceptance of the Jewish community within the larger social sphere. Aguilar not only draws from the models Enlightenment feminist writers used, but she also draws from the embedded nature of her own crypto-Jewish heritage that reinforces the tactic as well. Renée Melammed explains that in order to preserve their traditions and in order to resist Christian hegemony, crypto-Jewish women of the fifteenth century "engaged

in subversion" (170). They "used the means at their disposal to subvert the attempts by the Church and the Inquisition to eradicate their religious heritage . . . these women achieved such subversion not only by means of their traditional role, but also through their work, their sense of community, and a distinct awareness not only of what they were doing, but of why they were doing so" (166-167). Well aware of what she is doing and why she is doing so, Aguilar's championing of patriarchy is part of the fabric of her heritage as well as a way to enable Christian readers to identify with Jews. Aguilar upholds patriarchy not because she believes men are superior and certainly not because she believes women are weak. On the contrary, Aguilar's women are in positions of power, but she also knows that within British society, idealistic literary depictions will carry her mission on behalf of Jews much farther. Like her Enlightenment feminist predecessors, Aguilar takes advantage of the popular literary tropes and creates idealized pictures of Anglo-Jewish life in her attempt to alter ideological misconceptions of the Jewish Other in nineteenth century England. The goal, according to Jaffe, is to reach a common ground between the alienated and dominant segments of society. Aguilar is quick to insist that Jews are also English, and as such, share many of the same values, morals, desires and goals as their Christian brethren: "With the sole exception of the ordinances of their creed, [Jewish] households and families are conducted exactly on the same principles as English households of the same standing" (*Women of Israel* 558n).

In *The Nineteenth-Century Anglo-Jewish Novel* Linda Zatlin rightly observes that Aguilar "idealizes all her Jewish characters in an effort to evoke sympathy as well as tolerance" (39), but Zatlin underestimates and ultimately undervalues the larger significance of Aguilar's project when she further argues that Aguilar's reliance on didacticism conspires against her purpose (40). Zatlin goes on to argue that "like most propaganda fiction, [Aguilar's] works are too heavily biased by narrative assertion and too lightly supported or developed through characterization. As a response to the Victorian's ignorance of or antipathy for Jews, these works fail to enlighten or broaden their concept of that 'peculiar' people" (40).[30] Though Zatlin recognizes Aguilar's attempts to create a tolerant environment for Jews, she seems to ignore the very real problem of how Aguilar was to go about doing so. Aguilar needed to evoke sympathy for Jews and she relied on sentimental idealism and conventionality (admittedly heavy-handed at times) to do so. M.H. Abrams explains that in sentimental narratives "feeling is rendered in commonplaces and clichés, instead of being freshly verbalized and sharply realized in the details of the representation."[31] In opposition to realism, a narrative style that "represents life and the social world as it seems to the common reader" and presents "the very stuff of ordinary experience,"[32] sentimentalism puts "emphasis on the human capacities of sympathy."[33] In other words, rather than chance further alienation Aguilar errs on the side of clichéd and didactic caution to ensure sympathy, and ultimately to insure that her goals, could and would be realized. Always aware of her dual Christian and

Jewish audience, Aguilar might "use[ ] language that 'works' within Christian epistemology" (Scheinberg 186), but she never relinquishes her commitment to Judaism.

Aguilar was acutely aware of her position as both a female and a Jewish writer and thus conscious of British Jewry's position in England at the time. What results is a fiction that seeks shelter for the author and the otherwise alienated Jewish Other within socially acceptable English plots while simultaneously manipulating readers in order to reshape public conceptions of Jews. Anne Mellor explains, if an author is to fulfill her pedagogical purposes successfully, her narratives "must above all be *probable*": That is, even though cliché, the characters and situations must appear "in quotidian settings undergoing plausible experiences" (92) at the same time that they "balance the mind and the heart," make readers "feel intensely, and . . . stimulate the reader's ability to feel sympathy, and disgust, pity and revulsion" (93). Because Jews' existence had always been so contentious, not just in England but all over the world, Aguilar had to be careful in order to be successful.[34] Zatlin is too quick to condemn Aguilar by classifying her as little more than a "propaganda" writer whose reliance on nineteenth century England's own socially acceptable characterizations does more to promote "ignorance" and "antipathy" than to "enlighten." Because she attempts a kind of merging that had never been done before—the merging of the Jewish population in England with the larger British Christian society—Aguilar

relies on the acceptable, the "probable" and thus less threatening, elements of historical and domestic literary traditions to carry her forward.[35]

Zatlin seems to neglect, in fact, that by publishing stories like *The Perez Family* and *The Vale of Cedars*, Aguilar very publicly displays Jewish practice and ritual; we see Jewish Sabbath services, weddings, funerals, Passover Seders, and Yom Kippur fasts. Such an "outing" gives voice to a distinctly private existence that, until this time, was not openly discussed or portrayed positively. Because "reading" about Jews and Judaism is far less threatening than direct contact with the religion and its people, the novel provided Aguilar with access to society (both Jews as well as conversionists). Jaffe explains that "the distinction between sympathy for fictional characters and sympathy for actual people dissolves into . . . the difference between the pleasurable sympathetic feelings fiction invites and the potential threat of an encounter with an actual person. Pleasure . . . coincides with an absence of reciprocity: a fictional character cannot look back" (7). In other words, Aguilar's reader could close the book and "the Jew" remained contained on its pages, within its covers. Jaffe's thesis helps to establish the means by which Aguilar, as a Jewish female author, was able to transmit her message and, in effect, educate an audience that would not have otherwise been receptive to her propositions.[36]

This disengagement does not mean however, that the novel, or "recreative reading" as Aguilar terms it in *Spirit*, is any less powerful in its ability to effect change. On the contrary, novels are essential because:

> Our own faults or weaknesses frequently strike the mind, by their reflection on the pages we read. Humility is frequently strengthened by the contrast the well-guided heart discovers between itself and those whose actions excite our admiration and love; for it does not drown the still small voice by the common excuse for evil, that perfection is only found in books; it knows that often, unsuspected and unseen, yet more exalted virtue dwells on earth than ever fiction can portray; and when it dwells on faults and passion falling before temptation, led astray by pleasure and success, it is often led to look within itself, and silently and voicelessly send up the prayer for grace and strength, not to stumble through the like means. And thus, can it be considered impious and profane to render recreative reading subservient to the cause of piety? to the immortal interests of the soul? will it not rather lead the youthful student to look yet more diligently within his own heart, and prepare his mind to recognise in a measure the ever-acting Providence which guides and governs the actions alike of individuals and those of the whole universe around him? (*Spirit* 156-157)

Aguilar's readers could secretly sympathize with a character whom they would otherwise shun publicly—whether it was the medieval Marie Morales who declares "I am a Jewess" in *The Vale of Cedars*, or the nineteenth century Rachel Perez who leads her family's religious observances in *The Perez Family*. Because the novel was a literary medium less sensitive to censorship of public attitudes[37] it enabled Aguilar to touch an audience that was otherwise unwilling, if not incapable, to shed their defenses long enough to identify with Jewish characters. This identification is further evidenced in an 1847 correspondence between Rebecca Gratz and her niece Miriam Moses Cohen: "I am constantly lending [Aguilar's] books to my Christian friends—for tho' they will sometimes read, very few will buy them" (qtd in Galchinsky 362). In another letter to Cohen later that year (three weeks after Aguilar's death), Gratz illustrates Aguilar's ability to reach readers in the manner

Jaffe describes: "[H]er works . . . took possession of our minds and hearts. . . . She illustrated the beauties and virtues of character and brought them so naturally out as telling examples that all your sympathies were engaged: you could mourn with Eve in her fall, and Leah in her loneliness, while her lofty heroines carried you along with them in their enthusiasm" (qtd in Galchinsky 363). As Gratz's letter reinforces, the veiled space of the novel gave Grace Aguilar the opportunity to reach the inner-private world of readers who were not open to or ready for overt "preaching" in favor of Judaism.

To return to the questions I posed at the beginning of this chapter: what is narratable, for both a Jewish female author and a patriarchal Christian society and what does Aguilar narrate to keep readers reading while remaining true to her project and to Judaism itself? Aguilar finds voice in the historical romance[38] and domestic exemplar[39] literary genres. Because historical romance transports readers to another time and place, it is a useful genre for Aguilar to begin to rectify the damage of anti-Jewish sentiment, missionary and conversionist texts, as well as well-meaning Christian authors themselves, had done to the Jewish image. As we will see with *The Vale of Cedars*, the genre enables Aguilar to critique England's past and present treatment of Jews under the protection of faraway and exotic lands. Her turn to domestic tales allowed for more nuanced and realistic, though still sentimental, depictions of nineteenth century Jews and Anglo-Jewish families. Further, in conjunction with the historical and domestic genres, Aguilar also employed elements

of the conversionist genre to convey her message. In this regard, Bannet's discussion is also useful because it helps contextualize Aguilar's position in relationship to the subversiveness of conversionist literature. For Aguilar, who clearly rejects conversion and assimilation as an option, internalizes not the ideology, but the discursive methods of conversion to secure a place for Jews, as Jews, within British culture. This distinction is important. Aguilar harnesses the power of conversionist rhetoric and puts it to work against itself. However, instead of inspiring conversion, Aguilar's novels critique conversionist ideology, raise public awareness, and further motivate public attention to the reality of Jews living in England. "I am a Jewess! . . . I love my faith. . . . I cannot deny my faith" is not only Marie Morales's declaration in the face of persecution, ostracism, torture, and possible death as she lifts her veil and reveals her true identity to Ferdinand and Isabella in *The Vale of Cedars*, but it is also Aguilar's own declaration. Even in the stories in which she paints no pictures of Jews or Jewish life, Aguilar promotes her message of acceptance and integration. These genres—specifically the novel form itself—simultaneously bring Christians into the Jewish world and integrate Jews into the Christian world as Jews. As the stories make clear, in Aguilar's fictional (and hoped for) worlds, neither faith need fear the kind of integration she proposes.

By depicting what Jaffe terms "scenes of sympathy" in Victorian fiction, Aguilar's "narrative[s] . . . render visible otherwise invisible determinations of social identity" (8). As I explore in more specific detail in chapters three and four,

Aguilar's historical romances like *The Vale of Cedars* reveal the secretive and complex nature of medieval crypto-Judaism, and her domestic tales like *The Perez Family*, in which she lets readers into the social and familial intricacies of an Anglo-Jewish home, "render visible" what was an otherwise invisible and misunderstood existence. Aguilar makes Jews and Judaism spectacles of intimacy on her own terms, and evokes sympathy because her narrative constructions shine light on Jewish life and identity while thrusting readers into a world that will make Judaism erupt "into the light of unrelenting public discussion" (Chase and Levenson 12).

To realize her vision, then, Aguilar participates in what Bannet calls the "old-new paradigm of translation."[40] Enlightenment feminist writers linked what Pope and Dryden called "imitation" to "rewriting" and "repetition with difference" (Bannet 5) to their subversiveness. Translations "carry ideas, typologies, stories, and ideals across from language to language and from text to text; they also 'augment and modify the original' by iterating, transforming, adapting, adding, citing, parodying, selecting, omitting, and displacing its elements at will" (5-6). For Bannet, this paradigm is useful because when Enlightenment women writers are "understood as translators and transformers of cultural materials" they no longer appear compliant with patriarchal structures. Rather:

> [b]y translating hegemonic ideals in their own manner and adapting cultural values to their own ends, Enlightenment women writers both critiqued these values and ideals and moved beyond them. While carrying particular ideas, assumptions, and goals from men's texts into their own, they often analyzed them from a different place and altered, developed, and rewrote them for

> their own ends. . . . It was precisely by working both inside and outside cultural frames of reference in these ways that Enlightenment feminists took advantage of opportunities and possibilities implicit in the ideology and the culture to reconfigure women's domestic and social lot. (6)

This model is useful when pinpointing Aguilar's position as well. Extracting only the most useful elements for her purpose, Aguilar interpolates numerous forms—translating and melding them into her own narratives—to aid in transforming the Christian estimation of Jews and Judaism. For example, though she is unapologetically critical of the conversionist genre and its goals, Aguilar nevertheless translates defining characteristics of the genre in her historical romances like *The Vale of Cedars* to criticize the conversionist ideology of nineteenth century England. Thus, putting forth her own romantic version of the paradigm of translation that Bannet describes, Aguilar argues that accessing the "Truth" of Jewish history is a multifaceted task:

> Too often history, though accurate, is the mere *surface* of things, and Truth we are told lies at the bottom of a well, not on its frothy surface. We ought, therefore, to accustom ourselves to *search deeply* for it, not to be content with receiving it merely *second hand*. Now, Truth is often elicited, by using not only our *intellectual* but our *imaginative* capacities. The first permits us to examine and compare; to reflect and condense: and to exclude the peculiar prejudices of the author whom we read, and, looking steadily on the bare fact, trace its *causes* and its *end*. And yet we shall not find this exercise of the intellect or reflective power, perfectly satisfactory, unless we can combine and unite all those distinct and separate thoughts into one perfect whole by the power of imagination, or creation. We are aware that imagination has been called a dangerous gift, as leading to folly and romance. Unite it with RELIGION and INTELLECT, REASON and TRUTH, and. . . . [i]t will penetrate the imperfect records of the PAST. It will look calmly on the contending storms and dark pictures of the PRESENT, for through them it will trace the same calmly guiding hand, working the progression of mankind, to be visible

> only when the PRESENT becomes the PAST; and, the piercing the impenetrable fold of the FUTURE. . . . (*Women of Israel* 431-432)

Using her "imagination," Aguilar attempts to shed light on the "Truth" of Jewish history. While this undertaking is evident throughout her work, it is foremost in *The Vale of Cedars*. Galchinsky explains that the genre of historical romance lent itself to this kind of reshaping and was "instrumental in the Anglo-Jews' attempt to alter dominant perceptions of them, and to define themselves to themselves. . . . It is a polemical practice and an exercise in self-definition as well as an experiment in literary adaptation" ("Romancing" 289). The "paradigm of translation," a facet of Enlightenment feminist subversion and success according to Bannet, is a theoretical model that sheds light on Aguilar's use of genres—historical romance, domestic exemplar, conversionist—that though briefly discussed by few scholars, remains largely unexplored.[41]

Forcefully written by a Jewish woman who relied on her heritage and her gender to plead her case for Jews,[42] these kinds of narratives are the basis of Aguilar's larger project because they

> afford matter for instruction, thought, and subsequent conversation. . . . Here events can be traced from their very embryo to their final completion, either in success or overthrow. The airy trifles, so often the hinges on which great events turn, the almost invisible seeds of mighty revolutions, stand revealed on the pages of history, and if properly considered often serve as keys to the continual incongruities passing round us. (*Spirit of Judaism* 153).

Citing John Bigland's contention that "the history of human affairs . . . is but the history of Divine Providence" in *Letters on the Study and Use of Ancient and Modern History*, as "perfectly correct" (153) Aguilar goes on to insist:

> those very works read for profane instruction would assist to promote obedience to the command we are regarding. Nor is it only history that may do this. There are tales, simple, domestic, highly moral tales, which, though as a whole fictitious, are in the main point but narrations of what, should we but lift up the veil of the world, is continually passing around us. 'Truth is stranger, stranger than fiction;' and were this fact more considered, the very tales read for recreation and enjoyment might be made of service in the promotion of piety. . . . Formerly, indeed, light works were not fitted either to attract the eye or engage the heart; and there are very many now, too many alas! far more likely to produce evil than good. . . . [I]f the mind has been properly trained, the spirit of piety indelibly infused, even the perusal of such works will strengthen and improve. Few will believe this: a fanciful hypothesis it will in all probability be deemed; yet it is nevertheless true. . . . the effect of such pleasant recreation on minds which, educated in the school of piety, and of feelings . . . are ever accustomed to seek for the good, to cull flowers where others may see but weeds. (154-156)

What Aguilar was trying to accomplish then, and the way she went about doing so in the earliest part of her career, though not without faults, lays a solid foundation for the project that her letters and non-fiction prose suggest was to be an intentional, almost choreographed reshaping of "the Jew," "the Jewess," and the Jewish home in nineteenth century England.

When establishing the Jewish Historical Society of England in 1893, the founders "asserted passionately that the study of [Jewish] history could reinforce Jewish pride and help secure Jewish continuity. But they insisted that alongside any internal function it might perform, Anglo-Jewish history was also intended to show

the rootedness of Jews in English society, their contribution to English life and their patriotism" (Cesarani, "Dual Heritage" 34). Over sixty years before the society defined this purpose as its own, Grace Aguilar was working toward much the same end. As I discuss in chapter three, Aguilar was not only focused on re-fashioning Christian interpretations of Jews; she was equally concerned, if not more so, with re-igniting Jews' own sense of self-worth, of raising their estimation of themselves, to themselves, as Jewish selves. And it was a reshaping that, for Aguilar, had to begin in the past.

Notes

1. The blood libel in part grew from the Christian belief that "during Passover Jews were possessed by the fiendish desire to reenact the Crucifixion and satisfied this frenzy by murdering young Christian children" and drinking their blood. See Felsentein, *Anti-Semitic Stereotypes* (32).

2. Further supporting this point is an 1843 lecture, "The Encouragements Which Christians Have to Undertake the Conversion of Jews," by Rev. James C. Burns, just prior to the establishment of the British Society for the Propagation of the Gospel Among the Jews: "a spirit of inquiry . . . has been awakened among the Jewish people," Burns writes; " and were it not for fear of their own brethren on the one hand, and distrust of the Christians on the other, it is believed that multitudes, of whom we now hear nothing, would openly avow their change of mind" (12-13). This position and other similar to it are echoed by philo-Semites and conversionist societies during the period. See *Lectures on the Conversion of the Jews. Republished from the London edition by the American Society for the Melioration of the Condition of the Jews*. New York, 1846.

3. Though I have been unable to confirm or deny Amelia Bristow's own heritage, there is some indication that she may have been either a self-hating or a converted Jew. Her remarks in the Preface to *Emma de Lissau* certainly lend support to the possibility. Bristow writes that she is "intimately connected, and could therefore detail, with fidelity and accuracy" the events in the story. Many persons have questioned the *truth* of these details, The Author *knows* them to be affecting realities"

(iv). However, in her email correspondence with me regarding the issue, Professor Nadia Valman of the University of Southampton explains that "it's impossible to know what Bristow's religious identity was. Certainly, she tries to suggest that the narrative is autobiographical, as you note. But I'd say that it isn't possible to know whether this claim is itself fictitious, designed to lend greater authenticity to the text. Writing about this text opens up more questions than it answers, I think" (May 2005).

4. "The Jews at Damascus: A Mystery Hitherto Concealed, And Now Published For The First Time, Concerning The Hebrews, The Blood That They Take From Christians, and The Use That They Make of It, With Proof From the Scriptures." *The London Times*. 25 June 1840, 8. This full title is ironically classified by the paper as "News."

5.For further discussion of *Harrington*, see Judith Page, *Imperfect Sympathies* (133-158) and Michael Ragussis, *Figures of Conversion* (65-75).

6. In the *Women of Israel*, Aguilar refers to Edgeworth as a "first-rate female writer" even though she is not what Aguilar would term "spiritual." Similarly, Scott's writings "are as moral and pure as their more spiritualised brethren's" (574).

7."A Christian's Opinion of the Character of the Jews: To the Editor of the *Jewish Chronicle*." *The Jewish Chronicle* 6.22 (1850): 171.

8. In an 1815 letter criticizing the prejudice with which Edgeworth depicted "the Jewish nation, Mordecai writes:"Relying on the good sense and candour of Miss Edgeworth I would ask, how it can be that she, who on all other subjects shows such justice and liberality, should on one alone appear biased and prejudice: should even instill that prejudice into the minds of youth! . . . Can it be believed that this race of men are by nature mean, avaricious, and unprincipled? Forbid it, mercy. Yet this is more than insinuated by the stigma usually affixed to the *name*" (MacDonald 6). See *The Education of the Heart: The Correspondence of Rachel Mordecai Lazarus and Maria Edgeworth*. Ed. Edgar MacDonald. Chapel Hill: The U of North Carolina P, 1977.

9. Review. *Bucks Chronicle*. No date provided, included at the conclusion of Groombridge and Sons' edition of *The Women of Israel*.

10.See David Ruderman's *Jewish Enlightenment in an English Key: Anglo-Jewry's Construction of Modern Jewish Thought*, 215-216.

11. "The Talmudic writers *must* have thought highly and nobly of women, or such traits as we have brought forward, and those found in Hurwitz's Hebrew Tales,

would never have been admitted within their volumes" (*Women of Israel* 546).

12. See Sarah Aguilar, *A Memoir of Grace Aguilar*, and Michael Galchinsky, *Grace Aguilar: Selected Writings* for biographical and literary timelines.

13.Castro was a Portugese converso who had suffered under the Inquisition (see Lask). He wrote *Israel Defended* in Spanish, but it was from a French translation that Aguilar translated it into English. In her desire to soften the harshness of Castro's text, Aguilar's Preface resonates somewhat apologetically: "The different position which the Children of Israel now occupy in the Christian world, the enlightened and liberal spirit with which they are regarded in this free and blessed island more particularly; the wide difference between the kindly charity of Protestants, and the bigoted cruelty of Catholicism; all these have urged the translator to adopt a much milder tone of language towards the followers of Christ than that which pervade the original" (v).

14. The text was the very first published by Isaac Leeser's newly formed Jewish Publication Society of America.

15. It was the first explicitly doctrinal text Aguilar wrote, but not the first of all her works.

16. Remarks like these are liberally peppered throughout *Spirit*. For example: Aguilar acknowledges that improving the spiritual and temporal situation of the Jewish poor "is painfully limited, compared with the nations around us. Yet, were the *desire* more strongly felt, something might in time be done, and the Hebrews throw off the dark shackles of blinded superstition and of prejudices founded on a deplorable state of ignorance, which is to be feared is only too often found amongst them now. The poor, even as children, need instruction in their religion; it will not come untaught, nor can its mild consoling luster beam from the trammels of tradition, which must increase in incomprehensible obscurity with each new generation" (85). Leeser inserts one of his many "notes" here: "I am not permitted to alter the text so as to destroy the meaning; or else I should certainly have altered this sentence; for without claiming for tradition all that some assert for it, there is doubtlessly found laid down therein nearly the whole of *our own* manner of interpretation and mode of life. . . . what else forms the distinction between us and Christians?" (85). Firstly, by inserting the note as he does and where he does (all of the comments are included as footnotes and inserted just below Aguilar's points), Leeser surely does "alter the text," and thus somewhat "destroys" its meaning, because the reader is unable to continue on through Aguilar's discussion without their thought process being interrupted and distracted by the notes; secondly, Leeser's criticism here neglects, if not outright discounts, crypto-Jewish history. The

majority of Jews in England at this time were direct descendants of medieval crypto-Jews for whom the practice of "tradition" was severely restrained, if not entirely altered and unrecognizable as a result f their need for secrecy. For these Jews, there was little "tradition" other than the tradition of survival which meant altering "traditional Jewish" practices so as to protect their secret observance from discovery, persecution and/or death. See my discussion in chapter one. Also see Endelman, Jacobs and Melmmed.

Leeser also questions the validity of Aguilar's claims regarding conversion. In one of her many discussions on the issue in *Spirit*, Aguilar asserts: "let him *respect* his religion himself, and he will never fail to find it respected by others. Let the Hebrew attend more closely to these things, make more evident his love to his God, his reverence to His ordinances, the comfort he derives from this communion: and we would hear no more of attempted conversion, no more of wonderful converts; and this indeed would be seeking to serve the Lord, to love Him with all our might" (78-79). While one might criticize or question Aguilar's hopeful idealism here, Leeser does not. Instead, he "explains" that "this and few other similar expressions, used by my friend, I believe to allude to an unfortunate case of the conversion of the daughter of a highly honoured family. . . . I believe, however, the case to be a solitary one, almost at all events very rare" (79). That Leeser was either unaware or disbelieving that such practices were indeed far more than "solitary" during this time in England does little to help Aguilar's American contemporaries further understand the Jewish plight in England and other lands.

17. I include here the version of *Shemang Yisrael* [sic] Aguilar quotes at the beginning of *Spirit*, rather than a more modern translation. While Aguilar could read Hebrew, the Hebrew Bible had yet to be translated into English; therefore, what version and from what text Aguilar quotes the prayer is unclear and little reference information is given: "Hear, O Israel! The LORD our God, the LORD is one. And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might. And these words which I command thee this day, shall be upon they heart: and thou shalt teach then diligently unto thy children, and shalt speak of them when thou sittest in thy house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up. And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thy hand and they shall be as frontlets between thy eyes. And thou shalt write them upon the door-posts of they house, and on thy gates" (Deut 6: 4-9). For a contemporary Jewish translation see *Tanakh* (288).

18. Quoted from an 1844 letter to Miriam Moses Cohen. See Galchinsky, "Correspondence."

19. Unpublished letter from Grace Aguilar to Isaac D'Israeli 25 August 1842. I am again indebted to Michael Galchinsky for allowing me to use his personal transcriptions of these texts.

20. Aguilar is referencing *Home Influence*, *Mother's Recompense*, and *Women's Friendship*.

21. An unpublished letter from Sarah Aguilar to Solomon Cohen, 31 December 1851; Galchinsky, personal transcriptions.

22. All of these novels were written between 1830 and 1840. The fact that they remained unpublished after *Spirit's* reception is worthy of noting. Even though Aguilar's letters and journals do not indicate any reasons for the delay, I posit two suggestions. Most obvious of course is revision. It is possible that Aguilar did not feel the stories were ready for readers. This was the case with *Home Influence*, a domestic English tale that Aguilar wrote in the mid-1830s, but was not published until just after her death. Aguilar finished writing her author's preface to the story just a few weeks before she died in 1847. The second reason for the delay may perhaps be because Aguilar, though initially apprehensive after Franklin and Leeser's criticism, was nevertheless anxious for change for British Jews. She shifted her attention to using her narrative abilities to literally write that change. Almost all of the texts Aguilar works on from this point forward are about Jews, Judaism, Jewish identity, and Jewish history. As I go on to explore in later chapters, this motivation facilitated her role as an authoress and a Jewess in nineteenth century England.

23. Even though he solicited women writers for his newly formed Jewish Publication Society of America, Leeser, an Orthodox rabbi and traditionalist, felt that in matters of theology, "he had the duty to act as critic and sensor" (73). Similarly, the British Jacob Franklin, also Orthodox and a staunch opposer of Reform Judaism, did not believe "that a Jewish woman's pen could make as important a contribution to Anglo-Jewish self-understanding as a Jewish man's" (74). Jewish women did not have access to Hebrew (to sacred texts), and were prohibited from formal religious education . Paradoxically, however, "Jewish women were particularly vulnerable to the charge of unauthenticity" (152) because they lacked "formal education,"—as is clearly the basis of both Leeser and Franklin's criticism. Thus, denied education, women like Aguilar "were then faulted for not knowing enough" (152). Even though Aguilar may have had more access than other Jewish women during this time in England (her father taught her Hebrew), I agree with Michael Galchinsky's observation that she "was aware of her deficiencies in traditional knowledge" (154). As a result, the "content of much of her prose consists precisely of her calls for this situation to be rectified. To blame her for lacking equipment is to blame her for being a product of the very situation her work

seeks to alleviate" (154). See, *Origins*.

24. Elizabeth Langland explores what is "non-narratable" and thus narratable in *Nobody's Angels*: "classes do not intermarry in nineteenth century fiction and if they do, the marriages often culminate in social seclusion instead of social accommodation" (1). Langland's observations are particularly relevant when considering how Christians depicted relationships between Jewish women and Christian men. Almost always the Jewish woman marries the gentile, converts, and is absorbed by Christian society. For Aguilar, however, the unfortunate potential for such unions is recognized—*The Perez Family's* Reuben Perez, for example, marries a Christian woman—but such unions are "non-narratable." Aguilar does not depict their lives, and clearly rejects such unions. I discuss the novella further in chapter four.

25. I disagree with Galchinsky's interpretation of "The Authoress" as a Christian story. Unlike Aguilar's explicitly Jewish or Christian tales, "The Authoress" is religiously ambiguous. It is her only story to avoid specific religious affiliation in this way. This element serves as an important and revealing part of Clara's story and Aguilar's larger message. Though Michael Galchinsky, as well as Cynthia Scheinberg, suggest that Clara "was understood to be a Christian woman in her culture" (Scheinberg 150), I do not think we can assume, however, that Clara is "understood" to be of either faith. We know that Clara is an "English" woman and a "Religious" woman (221), but whether that religion resides in Judaism or Christianity is, I suggest, intentionally left vague. There are no descriptions of Sabbath observances, Friday night or Sunday services, as we see in Aguilar's other tales. Thus, Clara, as a writer with an undefined religious affiliation, is able to speak for and to women and men of both creeds. As I discuss more fully throughout the dissertation, Aguilar champions individual spirituality over doctrine; and Clara Stanley, because she does not clutch her Christian or her Jewish Bible, partake in specifically Christian or Jewish Sabbaths, brings to life Aguilar's underlying, yet pressing argument that "it is not the actual creed which marks the difference in individuals or families. It is the *study* or *neglect* of the Bible. . . . the spirit of the Christian religion is equally the spirit of the Hebrew; for both we owe the origin to the same Book" (*Jewish Faith* 39, 146). See "The Authoress," collected in Aguilar's *Home Scenes and Heart Studies*.

26. We do know, however (recall Aguilar's 1837 journal entry), that she hoped to use her writer's "talent" to do "some little good" on behalf of Jews and Judaism.

27. 1846 letter to Miriam Moses Cohen. See Galchinsky, "Correspondence," 107.

28. Though she does not list names, Aguilar criticizes writers who "continually eulogiz[e] Nature, yet never seem to cast a thought, or speak a word of God. Rapturous are the exclamations about the beauty of the works of *Nature*. . . . Nature is not herself a deity. She is the frame, not the FRAMER, the created, not the creator" (157). To support her point, Aguilar includes a lengthy passage from More's *Spirit of Prayer* (chapter 3, page 28 she cites in a footnote): "that the sun has shone unremittingly from the day that God created him . . . that the Hand which fixed him in the heavens and marked out his progress through them . . . to run his course for six thousand years, is [an] . . . astonishing exhibition of omnipotence . . . [that] Hand set him in motion" (158). The quote, though not directly related to Enlightenment Feminist subversion, nevertheless reveals that Aguilar had been reading the writers from the period.

29. Galchinsky uses a similar term, "mother-instructor" (180), in *Origins*.

30. Zatlin's comments are important because critical discussion of Aguilar's fiction, though more widely treated today than in 1981 when Zatlin wrote her book, is minimal. Further, modern scholars tend to invoke Zatlin's arguments in their own discussions and rarely question the relevance or validity of her claims. I take up this issue more fully at the beginning of chapter four.

31. See M.H. Abrams's discussion of the term in *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, 192.

32. Ibid, 174.

33. Ibid, 190.

34. Although not the subject of Mellor's discussion, Aguilar can be categorized as one of those women novelists who, as Mellor explains, "frequently employed their writing as a vehicle for ideological contestation and subversion, exploiting the novel's capacity for . . . sustained interrogation of existing social codes" (104).

35. In *Jane Austen, Feminism and Fiction*, Margaret Kirkham emphasizes that contemporary feminists are mistaken in thinking that methodologies (such as Aguilar's) have little to do with liberation: "The most orthodox beliefs," argues Kirkham, "when applied to a class of persons previously excluded from serious moral and political discourse, may take on a new aspect" (5). Kirkham rightly points out that we cannot approach late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth century female authors and "divide them into genuine feminists versus the rest, for at this period to become an author was, in itself, a feminist act" (34). Galchinsky also notes that "gender ideology and gender practices during the nineteenth century were not always synchronized with one another. . . . Many women were able to write as though they

were submitting to the separation of spheres while, through the very act of writing, they were transgressing the lines of separation" (*Selected Writings* 35).

36. In *The Rise of the Novel* Ian Watt similarly argues that the novel "makes us feel we are in contact not with literature but with the raw materials of life itself as they are momentarily reflected in the minds of the protagonists" (193). Reading becomes a private act, and the action itself induces reflection, securing "a complete penetration of the reader's subjective life"; when we read "we surrender ourselves entirely to the world . . . the printed novel describes" (Watt 198). Aguilar's work relies on this kind of reflection in her attempt to integrate Jews.

37. Ibid, 199.

38. I am working under the definition of the genre as one where the plot not only "takes its setting and some characters and events from history, but that makes the historical events and issues crucial for the central characters and narrative" (133). Further, as a romance, the historical novel emphasizes adventure, and is frequently cast in the form of the quest for an ideal, or the pursuit of an enemy; and the nonrealistic and occasionally melodramatic pursuit of an enemy . . . project in symbolic form the primal desires, hopes, and terrors in the depths of the human mind" (132). See Abrams.

39. Here, I am working under the definition of domestic exemplar as a genre "designed to expound . . . theoretical or practical knowledge, or else to embody, in imaginative or fictional form, a moral, religious, or philosophical doctrine or theme. . . . the materials are organized and rendered, not in order to present and to enhance their appeal as knowledge and doctrine, but primarily in order to enhance their human interest and their capacity to move . . . their audience" (44-45). See Abrams.

40. Bannet cites Derrida's *The Ear of the Other: Otobiography, Transference, Translation*. New York: Schocken, 1982. 122.

41. See Ragussis, Galchinsky, Fay, Zatlin. Nadia Valman also briefly discusses Aguilar's historical fiction and ultimately concludes that it was Aguilar's domestic fiction, and her desire to depict domestic sameness between Jews and gentiles, that characterizes the thrust of her literary achievements. See "Women Writers and the Campaign for Jewish Civil Rights in Early Victorian England." *Women in British Politics, 1760-1860*. Ed. Kathryn Gleadle and Sarah Richardson. London: Macmillan P, 2000. 93-114.

42. Interestingly, Aguilar's contemporary reviewers and critics were often surprised that she even used her real name at the time—a time when women writers often

relied on male pseudonyms to get their novels into the publisher's doors: "Grace Aguilar is not a nom de plume, but a bona fide name of a very accomplished Jewess" (Review. *The Vale of Cedars*. *Southern Quarterly Review* 2 (1850): 270-271). Similarly: "This is one of the best works of this graceful and popular writer. . . . Grace Aguilar (a *real* name, by the way,). . ." (Review. *The Vale of Cedars*. *National Era* 4 (1850): 114).

CHAPTER THREE
LIFTING THE VEIL: RECLAIMING AND RE-PRESENTING JEWISH HISTORY

We tell you, tapping on our brows,
The story as it should be,—
As if the story of a house
Were told or ever could be;
We'll have no kindly veil between
Her visions and those we have seen,—
As if we guessed what hers have been
Or what they are or would be . . . .
—Edwin Arlington Robinson, from "Eros Turannos," (1913)

> [I]t is impossible to close this notice of [Grace Aguilar's] last and best work [*The Vale of Cedars*], without lamenting that the authoress was so untimely snatched from a world she appeared destined, as certainly she was singularly qualified, to adorn and to improve.
>
> —Review, *Critic*[1]

> The object and end of the writings of Grace Aguilar were to improve the heart, and to lead her readers to the consideration of higher motives and objects than this world can ever afford.
>
> —Review, *Belle's Weekly Messenger*[2]

Though her 1851 essay in *Pilgrimages to English Shrines* pays homage to the life and work of "GRACE AGUILAR—a Jewess of mind so elevated, heart so pure, and principles so just and true, as to deserve a lofty seat among those 'Women of Israel,' whose lives were so beautifully rendered by her delicate and powerful pen" (451), Anna Maria Hall also sharply criticizes her fellow Christians for the prejudices they continued to harbor against Jews. She cannot understand why "in this day of

sunshine of civil and religious liberty . . . we are told [prejudice does] not now exist against the Jewish community . . . when it is impossible to observe society and not perceive that whatever political disabilities may be removed from them, individual prejudice . . . is as deeply seated, as in the days when faggot and fire were the ministers employed for their conversion" (451). Hall goes on to question: "How can it be that we, in our age, look down with cold, or scornful eye, upon [the] . . . children of Israel, whose history is the foundation of our faith? . . . The condemnation we give them is unworthy of us, and undeserved by them. . . . it is marvellous how those who think and reason on all new things, give in to old prejudices without question or examination—clinging with child-like tenacity to foul traditions, as if they were established truths" (452). While conversionists might have prided themselves on their "humane" treatment of Jews in direct opposition to medieval Spain, Hall clearly sees her co-religionists' "positive mission" no less prejudiced and certainly no less harmful than Ferdinand and Isabella's brand of persecution. "Century after century the Jews were oppressed, persecuted, and harassed by every form of exaction, outrage, and barbarity" (19), the missionary and Reverend H.F. Burder said in an 1843 speech on behalf of the British Society for the Propagation of the Gospel Among the Jews:

> Do we not owe to them, then, ample compensation for injuries so great? and how can we attempt that compensation . . . by . . . bringing them into the fold of the good Shepard. . . . We pity their ignorance, their wretchedness, and their guilt . . . [but] is it not the imperative requirement of Christian benevolence, that we should endeavor, with blended kindness and faithfulness

> . . . to place before them most persuasively the claims of the true Redeemer of Israel. (19-21)[3]

It was this very philo-Semitic mentality that Hall insists was "as deeply seated" and as deeply dangerous as the "fire" of the past. Though Hall only shines a brief spotlight on these "truths," she directs her readers to Grace Aguilar, "who, having done much to destroy prejudice and to inculcate charity" in her narratives, "merits the thanks of the true Christian as much as of the conscientious Jew" (463). What, exactly, Aguilar had "done" was attempt to reclaim and unveil the truth of her Jewish history, a "cause she had so emphatically made her own" (456). "Truth if sought, must triumph over prejudice" (224) the narrator tells readers in *The Vale of Cedars*; and it was with this belief that Aguilar picked up her pen.

Though it was among the last of her novels published in 1850, *The Vale of Cedars; or, The Martyr* was the first written (1831). It was the most poignant of Aguilar's fictional attempts to reclaim "Truth" by countering the "foul traditions" taken for "established truths" that Burder and other missionaries fervidly preached at the time. A tale of forbidden love, with the pending Inquisition and Edict of Expulsion just on the horizon, *Vale* is indeed, according to a reviewer for the *Critic*, "a historical romance of a high class."[4] Even though readers are taken on a narrative journey swelling with heightened emotion and adventure, "[t]here is a life-like reality about it, which is not often observed in works of this nature; while we read it we felt as if we were witnesses of the various scenes it depicts," explains another reviewer for *Bucks Chronicle* at the time of *Vale's* publication.[5] Michael Galchinsky suggests the

novel "can only be classified as a Jewish historical romance" (*Origins* 164). Yet this romance does not culminate with the marriage of the hero and heroine and the history depicts Queen Isabella as sympathetic to Jews, thus revising one of the most important facts regarding Jewish persecution, suggesting that *The Vale of Cedars*, like many of Aguilar's stories, is more than a historical romance. *Vale* is perhaps the most complex fiction in Aguilar's literary arsenal. Aguilar's romance between Marie Morales and Arthur Stanley—a secret Spanish Jew and an English Other living in Spain—is a story that simultaneously comments on the oppressive and often contentious philo-Semitic missions to the Jews in nineteenth century England. The novel is as much about Jewish persecution in England as it is about Jewish persecution in Spain. Working on several levels, *Vale* merges romantic idealism, conversionist revision, and historical fact to give rise to a kind of "imagination" in print that can in Aguilar's estimation, unveil "TRUTH," and "penetrate the imperfect records of the PAST. . . . look calmly on the contending storms and dark pictures of the PRESENT . . . and . . . pierc[e] the impenetrable fold of the FUTURE" (*Women of Israel* 432).

Historical romance plays an integral role in Aguilar's project for Jews; the genre gives her free reign to rewrite Jewish history from a Jewish perspective while also enabling her to address Christian readers within the less threatening context of a love story set centuries in the past and far from "civilized" England. Rather than turning to this genre because she "feared" writing about contemporary Jews as some

critics argue, or because she was simply following in Walter Scott's footsteps according to others,[6] Aguilar is able to address her contemporary English readers—Jews and Christians—within the context of a story that transports them from their present place and time. As I have discussed, Enlightenment feminists relied on a kind of encryption in their texts—of weaving religious, cultural, political and historical identity within, or as, narratives of home and heart. This intermingling provides readers with "a way of delving beneath the semantic surface, or making words speak their silences" (318), explains Elizabeth Fay. One of the many paradoxes Aguilar's use of the historical romance reveals is that it provides a veiled space to unveil the truth regarding Jewish persecution and history in order to improve Anglo-Jewish life in the present and for the future. As Michael Ragussis notes in *Figures of Conversion*, the urgency of Aguilar's entire project depends on unveiling (150) and on educating the English reader through historical fiction (149). Further, by using history "to look to the present in order to change the future," Aguilar "could open up concealed histories to Christian perusal, extending the crypto-Jewish transmission of oral histories and traditions to the Anglo culture at large" (Fay 219).

"Now History unfolds her ample page . . . "[7]

> Grace Aguilar always excelled in her delineations of female character, while the skill she evinces in the illustration of the historical personages, and her individualization of the imaginary ones, might at once entitle her to a birthplace among historical novelists.
>
> —Review, *Ladies' Companion*[8]

"Who draws example from the Jew?" Aguilar asks. "Who lingers on the page of history when it relates to them, and bids the heart glow in admiration of the sufferers, in sympathy with their unparalleled fidelity, in abhorrence of the awful spirit which prompted, and left not an effort untried, to procure their annihilation? None" (*Records* vi-vii). Aguilar does more than "linger." She assiduously maintains that revealing the nuances of crypto-Judaism is a historical imperative for both the sake of Jewish history as well as for the sake of nineteenth century England: "shall we only associate our ideas of the Jewish nation with what she *is*, never casting a thought on what she *was*" she implores in the *Women of Israel* (381). For how is Judea

> ever to realise that spirit of nationality and holiness which should be so peculiarly her own, if she knows little of her national history, save from Gentile writers—how know what is demanded of her *now*, if she does not sometimes ponder the *past*, remembering, while she shudders at the awful sufferings of her people, that what *has been, may be again*? . . . How is she to know . . . if she looks upon herself only as the child of the soil which has given her a home and all its attendant blessings? How is she to feel . . . if she looks on the history of her people as far too antiquated to concern her now, and lends but too ready an ear to the false tale. . . . How is she to reject prejudice, and to separate the true from the false, if all her information concerning the history of her people be derived from Gentile writers? It is expecting far too much from human nature to believe that we can *feel as Jews* only because we are *born such*—more particularly women, who, seeing so little different in the daily routine of their domestic lives from those around them, may be liable entirely to overlook their nationality, and imagine that a formal adherence to peculiar forms and ceremonies is sufficient for them; and, in consequence, know much less of their own history, teeming, as it does, with so much to interest and appeal, than that of the country in which they dwell. The scarcity of Jewish works by Jewish writers is the real cause of this much regretted evil. (377-378)

Writing these historical tales became a matter of not only self-definition but of re-definition for Aguilar—of claiming an identity by reclaiming Jewish history from the Christian, philo-Semitic world. Neither Jews nor Christians in the nineteenth century could build toward the future if the foundation on which they built was unstable and faulty because it was based on skewed and often entirely false historical evidence resulting from prejudice. Thus, the reflection on the past became Aguilar's agent for change. Aguilar begins with history to counter history. That is, she begins with the historical novel not only because she is responding to Scott, Edgeworth, Bristow, and others, but because the historical novel provides the essential materials and structures needed to rewrite the misrepresented history that conversionists and missionaries put forward to the public.

To begin to effect this change, then, Aguilar embeds history lessons throughout her narratives, summaries of Spanish history generally, the development of Jewish persecution in Spain, and the formalities and nuances of Jewish religious practices and rituals. Throughout *The Vale of Cedars*, for example, the omniscient narrator—who is identified as female and Jewish—interrupts the story to clarify issues regarding Spanish history or to explain the social sentiments and prejudicial motivations of the time. Aguilar consciously directs the reader's attention to the facts when she, or her narrator, breaks into Marie Morales's world. "Digression as this is, it is necessary clearly to comprehend the situation" (171), or, "it is necessary to glance back a few years" (23) are phrases often used to move in and out of the

fictional story. These intrusions are essential to the text because, as Ragussis explains, they unveil Aguilar's "own identity as a Jewish woman writing for an audience uneducated in the history of the secret race[;] she represents for her contemporary audience what Marie herself desired: the full disclosure of Jewish identity, without reprisal; the full authenticity of the Jewish woman's word, even as evidence of the legitimacy of Jewish history and Jewish belief" (150). While I agree with Ragussis, I contend that some of Aguilar's own authorial intrusions also function as a direct and pointed response to conversionists as well as contemporary critics. The interruptions attempt to educate readers in the history of crypto-Judaism and they reinforce the Jewish woman (Marie Morales, the narrator, and Aguilar) as strong and steadfast in her beliefs and in her faith. Furthermore, they directly respond to critical attacks opposed to Aguilar's presentation of medieval crypto-Judaism as well as her own position as a woman and a Jew in nineteenth century England. The delay in publication of the novel—*The Vale of Cedars* sat on the shelf until 1850, three years after her death and twenty years after the novel was first drafted—supports the possibility that as she revised the story Aguilar came to use the authorial asides as an additional outlet for responding to criticism. Comparing these excerpts in *Vale* to Aguilar's exchange with Isaac Leeser after the publication of the *Records of Israel* proves particularly revealing because they speak to a central question, as Galchinsky explains, on which critics continue to disagree when exploring her historical texts: "Did [Aguilar] fill her station as a crypto-Jewish woman passing

down the Sephardic oral tradition, or did she defile that station by writing the traditions down and placing them in the public sphere?" (*Origins* 151). Though Galchinsky himself does not provide an answer, I suggest that Aguilar does so through her stories, letters, and journal writings.

In the Preface to the *Records of Israel* (1844)—a collection of two histories, "The Edict: A Tale of 1492" and "The Escape: A Tale of 1755"—Aguilar explains that she "offers" her histories "to the public generally, in the hope that some vulgar errors concerning Jewish feelings, faith, and character may, in some measure, be corrected" and to "humbly serve the cause which she has most at heart, by raising from the dust of time and silence such records of our ancestors as cannot be wholly valueless to Israel" (x, xi). Like *The Vale of Cedars*, the stories collected in *Records* intimately explore the development and role of crypto-Judaism throughout Iberian history. For though there were histories of "the Hebrews," Aguilar observes, "the facts are passed over" (v) in Christian and explicitly conversionist revisions. Aguilar is foremost concerned with righting this history by writing the "records of a people, of whose modern history so little is generally known, that the word *Jew* is . . . connected with characteristics, feelings, and spiritual incitements, wholly distinct from those which relate to man in general" (v). Frustrated that the "modern tales in which [Jews] are introduced, are written by Christians, who know nothing of, and are consequently prejudiced against them" (qtd in *Origins* 144), Aguilar's historical

narratives are an attempt to reconnect Jews with their past and rectify the stereotypes and false "truths" that cast the culture and its people as "wholly distinct."

In an 1844 review of the *Records of Israel* for *The Occident and Jewish American Advocate*, Isaac Leeser writes:

> The readers of The Occident, even those who have not had the pleasure of perusing the Spirit of Judaism . . . must have been delighted with the occasional contributions from the pen of Miss Aguilar, which form, we believe, the first series of poetical effusions in the spirit of Judaism in the English language. We trust . . . that with us, they will hail the [Records of Israel]. . . . It is not large, but it needs not a big book to leave an indelible impression on the mind. . . . [W]e owe our valued correspondent many thanks for having, in a measure, endeavoured to supply that species of fiction for the rending of our younger branches.[9]

Though he begins with praise, Leeser ultimately aligns his views with Jacob Franklin who, in the *Voice of Jacob*, criticized Aguilar's crypto-Jewish delineations in the *Records of Israel* as "anti-Jewish" and promoting "hypocrisy":

> There are certainly defects in the work, and we share in the main, the remarks of our contemporary the 'Voice of Jacob:' 'We like these tales best of those written by Miss Aguilar . . . though fair criticism obliges us to suggest a little more habitual caution in the gifted author's exposition of what are, in reality, Jewish principles and opinions. . . . The simulation of Catholicism is . . . anti-Jewish, and, although, unhappily, such things have been . . . we should have liked to see Miss A. expressing that severe condemnation of such hypocrisy, which we are quite sure she thinks due to it.'[10]

Not unlike their initial comments regarding the *Spirit of Judaism*, Leeser and Franklin again issue a harsh critical blow in their response to *Records*. The attack this time, however, is more direct. Their remarks not only critique *Records'* function, but they also suggest that by lifting the veil off crypto-Jewish practice rather than condemning it, the stories and thus Aguilar herself, are anti-Jewish because they encourage

hypocrisy. Franklin's and Leeser's critique resonates with particular acidity; they attack not only the basis of Aguilar's mission on behalf of Jews, but also the core of her own Jewish identity. Thus, feeling both her work and herself wrongly condemned, Aguilar takes on new intensity.

Unlike her public silence after Franklin and Leeser's criticism of the *Spirit of Judaism*, Aguilar wastes little time responding to Leeser's newest charge:

> Rev. Sir . . . I am led to address you thus publicly, believing that when once you have seen the injustice of hasty adoption of the false charges contained in the "Voice of Jacob" against my "Records of Israel," you will at once retract them, by allowing me sufficient space in your magazine for the insertion of this letter, containing, as it will, the vindication of my work. . . . Acquainted as you no doubt are with the history of the Jews in Spain and Portugal, I cannot but feel surprised that you should allow the mistaken views of the "Voice of Jacob" regarding simulation of Catholicism so to actuate you, as to give them forth as your own opinions.[11]

Because the "simulation of Catholicism" in Inquisitorial Spain was literally a life or death necessity for Sephardic Jews, Aguilar has difficulty reconciling this criticism with the historical facts as she knows them and questions: "why then, dear sir, so hastily burthen me with the grave charges promulgating anti-Jewish opinions, because. . . I do but portray strictly historical truth?"[12] As Aguilar goes on to argue, claims of anti-Jewish sentiment and hypocrisy are not only unwarranted, but unjust:

> I could not reprehend this simulation as hypocrisy, because I do not consider it as such. The miraculous preservation of God's chosen people, and of their holy Faith, in a land where revealed Judaism was death . . . I can only feel awe[ ] . . . and admiration [for] that constancy which preserved us true and faithful to every ordinance of our religion in an atmosphere of death. . . . [S]o true a picture is [this] . . . *history* of our people, that I have been told there are now living in Portugal five or six families, who, were the tale read to them, would exclaim that they were listening to the histories of their own

> families,—that from the first scenes . . . to the last, it is but a perfect picture of an age but very lately passed,—the concealed Jews, or *Nuevos Christianos*, as they were called, being compelled to observe still greater strictness in outward semblance of Catholicism than the Catholics themselves. How then can so true a picture of modern Jewish history be condemned as anti-Jewish? and how may it be condemned as hypocrisy, when at that period, and in those kingdoms, even suspicion of Judaism was death?[13]

While Aguilar has neither the space nor the time to convey the entire history and reasoning behind the development and further maintenance of secret Judaism in her letter to *The Occident*, she certainly has the space and power to do so in her own novels. Comparing this 1844 letter to Aguilar's narrative insertions in *The Vale of Cedars* reveals a tone and language that are not only strikingly similar, but that also resonate with a purpose. This congruence suggests Aguilar herself, not the narrator, reaches out beyond Marie Morales's story to uphold the importance and relevance of the fictional story itself, as well as the necessity for British Jews to understand crypto-Jewish history. Further, the insertions, much like the letter, also function to insure Aguilar's crypto-Jewish ancestors and their plight are given due reverence for the conditions under which they suffered and the sacrifices they had no choice but to make if they were going to survive at all:

> The fact that the most Catholic kingdom of Spain, was literally peopled with secret Jews, brands this unhappy people, with a degree of hypocrisy, in addition to the various other evil propensities with which they have been so plentifully charged. Nay, even amongst themselves in modern times, this charge has gained ascendency; and the romance writer who would make use of this extraordinary truth, to vividly picture the condition of the Spanish Jews, is accused of vilifying a nation, by reporting practices, opposed to the upright dictates of the religion and the lord. It is well to pronounce such judgement *now*, that the liberal position which we occupy in most lands, would render it the height of the dissimulation, and hypocrisy, to conceal our

> faith; but to judge correctly of the secret adherence to Judaism and profession of Catholicism which characterized our ancestors in Spain, we must transport ourselves not only to the *country* but to the *time*, and recall the awfully degraded, crushing, and stagnating position which *acknowledged Judaism* occupied over the whole known world. (*Vale* 168-169)

Aguilar makes no apologies; instead, she defends herself, "the romance writer who would make use of this extraordinary truth" against the *Voice of Jacob's* claims that doing so is "anti-Jewish."

The pages that follow this passage in *Vale* provide a brief, though well documented[14] history of the development of crypto-Judaism that led to the necessity and further persistence of the practice prior to and during Ferdinand and Isabella's reign. Quoting Gibbon's *Decline and Fall* throughout, Aguilar explains:

> As early as 600 . . . intolerance began to work against the Jews . . . in Spain . . . some authorities assert earlier[15]. . . . [W]hen persecution began to work . . . 'Jews were compelled to receive the sacrament of baptism,' the bodies of the more obstinate tortured, and their fortunes confiscated; and yet—a remarkable instance of inconstancy—*they were not permitted to leave Spain*; and this species of persecution continued from 600 downwards. . . . and a statute was enacted, ' that the Jews who had been baptized should be *constrained*, for the honor of the church, to preserve in the *external practice* of a religion which they *inwardly* disbelieved and detested.' How, then, can compelled obedience to this statute be termed hypocrisy? Persecution, privation, tyranny, may torture and destroy the body, but they cannot force the mind to the adoption of, and belief in tenets, from which the very treatment they commanded must urge it to revolt. (169)

The experience of becoming and existing as a crypto-Jew was not only necessary in Aguilar's estimation, but it was a kind of "pseudo-conversion survival tactic" (Fay 217). For "how would it have availed [the Jews] to relapse into the public profession of the faith they so obeyed and loved in secret" (*Vale* 170), she asks, short

of securing their fate tied to a stake. Using and integrating Gibbon's *History* within the context of a fiction also lends support to Aguilar's position against conversionist revisions of Jewish history and persecution—such tales are not the only ones that can educate British society about Jews. By embedding historical commentaries like this one throughout the novel, Aguilar gains access to readers who might have otherwise passed over the discussion as no more than the product of a "mere Jewess's" fanciful imagination, or her stereotyped "Jewish exaggeration and ignorance." Aguilar is clear; Jewish history is no fiction. Anticipating this reaction from particularly Christian readers, she supports "truth" with Gibbon while garnering sympathies at the same time. Jolting readers from medieval prosecutorial sentiment into the present, the narrative reminds them that in nineteenth century England "[i]t is easy to talk now of such proceedings being their right course of acting, when every land is open to the departure and entrance of every creed; but it was widely different then, and even if they could have quitted Spain, there was not a spot of ground in the whole European and Asiatic world, where persecution, extortion, and banishment would not equally have been their doom" (170). Thus, the continuation of crypto-Judaism under Ferdinand and Isabella's rule, under conditions "so degraded, so scorned, so exposed to constant suffering, that . . . when by the mere continuance of external Catholicism—which from its universality, its long existence, and being in fact a rigidly enforced statute of the state, *could* not be regarded as either hypocrisy or sin" (170) and was necessary if Jews wanted to survive.

In their critique, Leeser and Franklin overlook the most important element regarding this issue in *Records'* first story, "The Edict": the hero and heroine, Imiri and Josephine, do not resign themselves to crypto-Judaism like many of their Jewish family members and neighbors had done. As they listen to Spanish soldiers read the Edict of Expulsion,[16] they learn that they must abandon their faith and convert or leave the country (i.e., the home) they love; death is the final consequence should they choose not to comply. They do, however, have one option, as Imiri explains: "there were some of their unhappy countrymen, who, rather than lose the honourable situations they enjoyed, the riches they possessed, had made a *public* profession of Christianity, and received baptism at the very moment they made a solemn vow in secret to act up to the tenets of their fathers' faith (49). Josephine replies:

> 'Alas! are there indeed such amongst us, thus doubly perjured?' . . . . 'They do not think it perjury, my beloved: they say the God of Israel will pardon the public falsehood, in consideration of their secret allegiance to Himself. . . . [W]hen I think on . . . the misery we must all endure—I could wish my mind would reconcile itself to act as theirs do; that to serve my God in secret, and those of wood and stone in public, were no perjury'. . . . 'O do not say so Imiri . . . I love not my home better than my God—I would not accept peace and prosperity at such a price!' (49-50)

Aguilar clearly argues for the necessity of crypto-Judaism for Jews' literal survival during this time—Imiri and Josephine ultimately meet their death as they flee Spain by ship at the end of the story. However, "The Edict," the very narrative Leeser and Franklin label "anti-Jewish" because it supposedly promotes rather than "condemns" crypto-Judaism, recognizes that assuming the secret veil was not ideal nor acceptable

for all Jews. Josephine indeed "condemns" the practice. Aguilar does not negate this historical fact; rather, she expressly recognizes here, as well as in *Vale*, that "[t]here were indeed some few in Spain, before the final edict of expulsion in 1492, who were Hebrews in external profession as well as internal observance" (*Vale* 170). In direct opposition to Leeser and Franklin, Aguilar maintains that stories like *The Vale of Cedars* and the *Records of Israel* are necessary because as "fictions" they ironically "bring historical truth more clearly forward" (*Records* viii)—they portray Jews embracing *and* rejecting crypto-Jewish practice. The subject is so complex, so full of inquiry, Aguilar tells readers in *Vale*,

> that in the limits of a romance we cannot possibly do it justice; but to accuse the secret Jews of Spain of hypocrisy, of departing from the pure ordinances of their religion, because *compelled* to simulate Catholicism, is taking indeed but a one-handed, short-sighted view of an extensive and intensely interesting topic. We may often hope for the *present* by considering the changes of the *past*; but to attempt to pronounce judgement on the sentiments of the *past* by reasoning of the *present*, when the mind is always advancing, is one of the weakest and idlest fallacies that ever entered the human breast. (170-171)

Aguilar's blanket condemnation of the practice, or support for that matter, would not only have made a sweeping generalization of historical reality like conversionists had done, but it would have made Aguilar guilty of her own charge against Franklin and Leeser: "taking indeed but a one-handed, short-sighted view." Thus, Aguilar could not, would not, strictly condemn or praise.

Feeling passionately about the ancestral heritage her parents instilled in her from the time she was a small child, Aguilar chose to reveal that history and all of its hardships to readers, critics, and especially missionaries who peddled their own

brand of revised Jewish history. Leeser and Franklin's insistence that Aguilar's depiction of the "simulation of Catholicism" was "anti-Jewish" and reinforced rather than condemned the religious hypocrisy of the practice, was indeed a blow to her authorial ego and an insult against her position as a Jewish woman working on behalf of Jews and Judaism. As such, it was the one critical assertion that Aguilar could not let go unanswered. She not only casts her response within the narrative voice of *Vale*, but she demands respect as both an author and a "Jewess" in the final lines of her 1844 letter to *The Occident* as well:

> Surely, my dear sir, . . . you were over hasty in the adoption of charges which *have no foundation*; and . . . with . . . candour and liberality . . . you will retract your first judgment, and remove the heavy charge, which . . . *must* render the little work entirely *unfit* for the perusal of Jewish youth, to whom, notwithstanding, you recommend it. I repeat, that I do not believe you would wilfully publish any thing likely to injure my reputation as a writer, or my sentiments as a Jewess, and that therefore you adopt the words of the "Voice of Jacob," without sufficiently considering their very injurious import. My work has been reviewed by eight or ten different English papers in a manner not only gratifying and encouraging to me as an author, but as a Jewess, by the remarks which the tales called forth on my nation. Is it not then both strange and somewhat *anti-Jewish*, that the press of my own nation, instead of *encouraging*, should *depress*, and instead of gladly having a fellow-labourer in the literary path, burden her with such unjust charges as must tempt her, in weariness and sadness, to cease working for those, whom, with heart and soul, were she but encouraged, she would serve?
>
> Trusting that this letter will prove a sufficient vindication of my little work, and that by its speedy appearance in your magazine, you will prove to me and to my friends that my inference is correct, and that you would shrink from doing me any wilful injury.
>
> I remain yours very truly,
> The Author of the Records of Israel.[17]

Whether or not Aguilar wrote the 1844 response to her critics prior to her comments in *The Vale of Cedars* is something I cannot say for sure. However, Aguilar's comments in her letter to Leeser and the authorial asides in *Vale* suggest that, for her, historical fiction had a significant purpose and function; she was not simply writing for entertainment's sake. Rather, stories like those in *Records* and *The Vale of Cedars* are not as much about specific characters and their harrowing romantic relationships as they are about revealing the reality of the crypto-Jewish plight; they are about recasting that history in narratives that were enticing to readers and could evoke sympathy on behalf of Jews while conveying as near to the truth and the reality of Jewish life and crypto-Jewish life as possible. The ultimate "anti-Jewish" act, according to Grace Aguilar, was sweeping the people and their history, and thus discounting them altogether as conversionists had done, under the rug in shame for their supposed religious "hypocrisy." At the same time, however, Aguilar herself is aware that even she is unable to convey the truth entirely: "Defects in my little book I have no doubt there are—for where is there a perfect work," she admits. Nevertheless, she is unwilling to shroud, or entirely condemn, the very real history of the Iberian Jewish community that was growing in England at the time. Instead, Aguilar reclaims and re-writes that Jewish history in the hope that nineteenth century Jews could better establish themselves in England. In answer to Galchinsky's question, Aguilar does indeed fulfill "her station as a crypto-Jewish

woman passing down the Sephardic oral tradition" (151), only now it need not be strictly oral; she can write it down for "the record" and for the history books.

Aguilar's impact is evident just three years after her death in an 1850 article, "The Progress of Literature Among the Jews,"[18] written by a member of the newly formed Hebrew Literary Society. The unnamed author explains that "the formation of literary societies among the Jews in England [was] a gratifying proof that they, relieved from oppression of former days, [were] prepared to take their stand among the rising intellect of the land" (9). In addition to improving the intellectual stature of, as well as removing ignorance about, Jews by being a source of "opportunity for gaining information on the Jewish religion and literature," the founders of the society also insisted that "every Jew," regardless of class or economic stature, must have access and be able "to enjoy . . . all the advantages connected with the society" (9). These advantages included the perusal of the library they were attempting to build. For though committed to supporting lectures on the Scriptures as well as on Jewish literature, "the funds of the Society [were] exclusively applied to the purchase of Hebrew books, or books treating on Jewish literature, *written by Jews*" (9) because the deficiency in knowledge regarding Jewish religion and literature could "not [be] removed by the delivery of sermons" alone (9). The members of the Society lamented that there were "very few books of this kind" (9), but they were grateful to begin their collection with "the excellent writings of Miss Aguilar" (10), as well as, ironically, "old copies" of the *Voice of Jacob* and the *Jewish Chronicle*. These books, in

conjunction with the donation of "a great number of scarce and valuable Hebrew works," were instrumental, the Society claimed, in its and future Hebrew Literary Societies' abilities to improve "the spiritual condition of the community . . . [and] the uneducated" (10).

In light of this evidence and Aguilar's own responses to criticism, I am perplexed by Linda Zatlin's late-twentieth century charge that Aguilar's historical fiction "distances everything Jewish" (37), "oversimplifie[s]" Jewish rituals and customs and "ignores spiritual meaning" (35). Not unlike conversionists, Zatlin's interpretation ignores the essential historical reality that many Jews in England during the early nineteenth century descended from the crypto-Jews of medieval Spain and Portugal.[19] As I discuss in chapter one, they often had little in the way of their own *traditional* Jewish rituals and customs. Additionally, even in a freer England, Jews were continually pressured to internalize Christian culture and practices to the point of losing what little Jewish identity they had left. I agree with Cynthia Scheinberg's contention that the fact that Aguilar revealed any elements of "her private faith to the censorious world" (188) at all was daring and risky, particularly in light of the intense pressures Jews faced to convert and be absorbed by Christian society at the time. As early as the *Spirit of Judaism* Aguilar writes against this grain and defines her works as dedicated to reigniting the spirit of Judaism: "Oh that Israel would awake from their lethargy, and *prove* there is a holy spirit in the Hebrew faith" (163). Aguilar does not presume to dictate or to teach Jewish forms,

customs or rituals in the scholarly sense; rather, she wants to reconnect the nineteenth century Anglo-Jewish community with the spirit of both their history and their faith: "Her aim is to *aid*, not to dictate," she writes in the Preface to *Spirit*, but "to *point* to the Fountain of Life, not presumptiously to *lead*; to awaken the spirit to its healing influence, to rouse it to a sense of its own deep responsibilities, *not* to censure and judge" (11). Further, Aguilar also desires to "assist the followers of other creeds in obtaining a truer and kinder estimate of the Jewish religion than . . . they now possess" (11); her "earnest hope" is that "a fair and candid perusal of [her] pages will remove any prejudices concerning the Hebrew nation, by drawing aside the blinding veil in which ignorance had enveloped her, and touch some hearts which are not entirely closed against conviction and benevolence, with love and veneration" for Jews (12). Aguilar acknowledges that she does not linger on "the forms and ceremonies" of Jewish practices because it is "the spirit of Judaism [she] wishe[s] to vindicate; to prove, that even as [with] Christians it can . . . support [Jews] under every briar, by bidding us look up for thoughts and comfort where alone they can be found" (qtd in *Origins* 163).

Furthermore, as Galchinsky explains, Aguilar was addressing two audiences and thus her "double address reveals a double consciousness and a double project. As an emancipationist, she speaks with authority . . . as a teacher to an admittedly ignorant but willing Christian audience. As a Jewish woman speaking to Jews, however, she speaks in a much humbler tone . . . she is a servant to the cause" (173).

That stories like *The Vale of Cedars* "distance Judaism" because they do not extensively delineate the forms of Jewish practices or because they refer to Hebrew prayers when spoken as a language "entirely unknown," rather than quote the ancient words themselves, does not mean ipso facto that Aguilar "oversimplifies" rituals and practices and "ignores" spiritual meaning. Though Zatlin admits that Hebrew would have been unknown to the Christian reader for example, she nevertheless argues that "it [was] known to the participants and to the author, who could if she would identify it" (36). Zatlin misses what is perhaps the most important point: Aguilar wants to draw in Christian readers. Galchinsky explains that because Aguilar addresses "two audiences, she must be two different personae as the circumstances require" (174-175). Would she have been as successful had she specifically outlined all of the forms of religious practices; would she have been as successful had she written in Hebrew, in a language that the majority of her readers did not understand? That Hebrew would have been foreign to Christians is certainly the case. Aguilar's decision to allude to the language, rather than explicitly vocalize it, to convey the essence of Jewish experience and observances at this time and under these conditions, instead of overly-detailed explications, suggests that she was indeed aware that doing so might push Christian readers, the very audience she wanted to draw closer, further away; they would not be able to identify with what they did not and could not understand.

At the same time, Aguilar's histories do address many of the rituals and practices associated with holidays, weddings, funerals, and Sabbath observances as they might have been experienced within the crypto-Jewish community. For example, early in *Vale* the narrator explains:

> It was the custom of the inmates of the Vale of Cedars, once in every year, and generally about the season of Michaelmas,[20] to celebrate a festival, which ordained the erection of a booth or tent of "branches of thick trees," in which for seven days every meal was taken, and greater part of the day (except the time passed in the little Temple) was spent. Large branches of the palm and cedar, the willow, acacia, and the oak, cut so as to prevent their withering for the seven days, formed the walls of the tent; their leaves intermingling over head, so as to form a shelter, and yet permit the beautiful blue of the heavens to peep within. Flowers of every shade and scent formed a bordering within; and bouquets, richly and tastefully arranged, placed in vases filled with scented earth, hung from the branches forming the roof. Fruit, too, was there—the purple grape, the ripe red orange, the paler lemon, the lime, the pomegranate, the citron, all of which the vale afforded, adorned the board (which for those seven days was always spread within the tent), intermingled with cakes made by Marie. This was one of the festivals for which many of the secret race would visit the vale. . . . At the close of the solemn fast which always preceded by five days this festival of rejoicing. (38-39)

Like Zatlin, Galchinsky argues that Aguilar's "Jewish audience is immediately distanced" from narrative explications like these because they are familiar with the rituals and the observances. However, Galchinsky goes on to recognize that Aguilar's "Christian audience might be distanced from it if she did *not* give the explanation. By giving the explanation, she prioritizes the attempt to gain toleration by Christians over the need to reflect Jewish experience back to Jews" (*Origins* 174). While securing toleration for Jews among Christians is key for her larger project, Aguilar also carefully balances this desire with the need to re-educate Jews. As I have

discussed, Aguilar was concerned that the nineteenth century Anglo-Jewish community had lost their connection with their Jewish identity and heritage in favor of an assimilated English, and thus Christianized, existence. The need for Jews to regain some semblance of that identity through recounting elements of Sephardic history, according to Aguilar, was equally important as the need to teach and expose Christian readers to Jews other than those of a conversionist's making. Thus, Aguilar's lengthy description of Sukkot in *The Vale of Cedars* (quoted above), a Jewish holiday with both historical and agricultural significance—the only Jewish holiday whose rituals are explained in extensive detail in the story, even though wedding and funeral rituals are briefly described in the novel—is pregnant with meaning in a narrative devoted to conveying the history of a crypto-Jewish community struggling to maintain their own safety under the threat of medieval persecution and religious zeal.

Sukkot invokes the forty years that ancient Israelites wandered the desert after their exodus from Egypt. Agriculturally, the celebration signifies the fall harvest and follows the most sacred of Jewish observances, Yom Kippur—noted as "the solemn fast" at the end of the passage. For protection from the elements temporary shelters were built; the holiday and the modern celebration pays tribute by building similar temporary dwellings or "booths" (*sukkot*). In opposition to the seriousness of the holiest of Jewish days, the Sukkot celebration is joyous. Aguilar juggles a number of different elements here: the comparison between Michaelmas—the Christian fall

harvest celebration—and Sukkot suggests to readers that Jewish celebrations are not "foreign" or entirely unlike their Catholic and Protestant counterparts. Further, the imagery of the *sukkah*, within the Vale of Cedars itself, is particularly telling. As crypto-Jews, Marie and her family literally live among nature, mimicking their ancient ancestors. Though the Vale has become a permanent home, it nevertheless began in a similar makeshift fashion as the *sukkah*—as protection not only from the elements, but from the prosecutorial eyes of Spanish soldiers and religious zealots. The Vale provides a home in "a small valley, where orange and lime trees, the pine and chestnut, palm and cedar, grew in beautiful luxuriance" (16) and forms a natural dwelling spot even though "the hand of man had . . . evidently aided nature in forming the wild yet chaste beauty of the scene" (16). It offers "a refuge and concealment from the secret power of the Inquisition. . . . a comfortable home and a concealed retreat. . . . Nature herself appeared to have marked the spot as an impenetrable retreat" (33). Marie's Vale provides protection from the outside world in much the same way the ancient dwelling had done and as the modern *sukkah* symbolizes. Also, like her ancestors, Marie and the other crypto-Jews are forced to flee (in a sense); they are forced into hiding for their own safety and they must shed their public identity as Jews. What began as "a refuge and concealment from the secret power of the Inquisition. . . . became not only a safe, but a luxurious home" (33-34). The image of the *sukkah* within the Vale conjures not only the history of the homeless Jew, but it reinforces both the crypto-Jewish feelings of

homelessness as well as nineteenth century Jews' further inability to settle securely in England because their identity, as Jews, was continually being questioned as they were prodded toward conversion.

Aguilar's depiction of Marie and other crypto-Jews observing Sukkot and commemorating their ancestral history in this way, particularly in a time of medieval instability, directly opposes Zatlin's charges and further suggests that *The Vale of Cedars* is a novel that clearly speaks to Jews' devotion to rituals and practices even when under threat of persecution and possible death. Like Franklin and Leeser's criticism of *Records*, Zatlin's criticism of *The Vale of Cedars* is not only unwarranted, but itself "ignores" the gravity under which Aguilar was working and negates the larger goal the stories and non-fiction prose tried to convey. In an attempt to gain acceptance and integration for her people, Aguilar not only worked toward rekindling Jews' own connection with their faith but she wrote to counter the misguided interpretations most Christians both had and perpetuated about Jews and Judaism:

> We envy not those who feel no sympathy in that devotedness to a persecuted faith, which could bid men go forth from their homes, their temples, the graves of their fathers, the schools where for centuries they had presided, honored even by their foes, and welcome exile, privation, misery of every kind, woes far worse than death, rather than depart from it. If they think we have exaggerated, let the sceptic look to the histories of every nation in the middle ages, and they will acknowledge this simple narrative is but a faint outline of the sufferings endured by the persecuted Hebrews, and inflicted by those who boast their religion to be peace on earth and good will to all men. Reduced from affluence to poverty, from every comfort to the dim vista of every privation, without the faintest consciousness where to seek a home (*Records* 48)

Aguilar writes to distance Jews and Judaism from the conversionist revisions and misrepresentations of Jews and Judaism found in "the modern tales . . . written by Christians, who know nothing of, and are consequently prejudiced against them" (qtd in *Origins* 144). As Galchinsky explains in *Origins* and as I develop further in the next section, historical romance was "internally connected" with religious reform for Sephardic Jews like Aguilar "by virtue of the fact that each . . . gave priority to individual freedom and desire over communal dictates" (143).

"In His hand is my heart, and my hope . . ."[21]

> We have read none of her novels with more satisfaction than this. At a period when romance writing has been so much perverted from its true purpose, it is delightful to find a novelist who, to a talent for narrative, united a regard for the highest and purest sentiments of human nature.[22]

In *A Natural History of the Romance Novel* Pamela Regis[23] defines the genre as containing eight essential narrative elements: "*a definition of society*, always corrupt, that the romance novel will reform; the *meeting* between the heroine and the hero; an account of their *attraction* for each other; the *barrier* between them; the *point of ritual death*; the *recognition* that fells the barrier; the *declaration* of heroine and hero that they love each other; and their *betrothal*" (14). Regis argues that romance "is not silly and empty-headed. . . . [it] contains serious ideas. The genre is not about women's bondage, as the literary critics would have it[24]. . . . [it] is, on the contrary, about women's freedom" (xiii). Rather than seeing the genre as a straightjacket for women and their readers, Regis suggests that heroines are empowered and they achieve their "quest." They

> are not extinguished, they are freed. Readers are not bound by the form; they rejoice because they are in love with freedom. . . . The heroine's freedom in the form of her life, her liberty, or her property may be in doubt not only in the original society that promotes the barrier, but also in the new society at the end of the work. Nonetheless, the heroine's freedom, however provisional, is a victory. She is freed from the immediate encumbrances that prevent her union with the hero. When the heroine achieves freedom, she chooses the hero. (16)

I argue that *Vale* exhibits many of the elements of the romance genre as Regis outlines them; however, Aguilar's heroine, Marie Morales, chooses an unconventional hero. It is not Arthur Stanley she ultimately desires, but rather her Jewish faith and the "freedom" to live openly as a Jew. Further, if the "creation of a couple that gets along clear sightedly is the goal" and "[a]ccomplishing this 'pragmatic freedom' [necessitates] . . . a movement from illusion to reality," according to Regis (29), then *The Vale of Cedars* becomes a tale that, between the lines of the heroine's struggle with her religious identity and love relationships, attempts to unite and ultimately integrate not the conventional hero and heroine with the otherwise barriered society, but nineteenth century Christians and Jews with each other as "English men and English women." It is a movement toward freedom of religious identity for real Jews in nineteenth century England through Marie Morales's fictional quest for the same in medieval Spain. Marie's story as a romance works for Aguilar because it lends itself to the Enlightenment feminist tactics of effecting change in the reality of everyday life through the illusory world of fiction. In this way, Aguilar tries to rekindle the relationship between Jews and their

history and Jews with their faith while also evoking sympathy for past and present Jews in Christian minds, rather than contempt, hatred, and fear.

Vale is an ambitious attempt for Aguilar and one that relies heavily on imbedding for its success. Constructing a tripartite narrative structure that uses the kind of encryption I discuss in chapter two, Aguilar successfully enhances readers' receptiveness to the lessons in Jewish history and tolerance she wants to convey by cushioning her crypto-Jewish tale within what is ostensibly an English hero's adventure. Readers do not meet the Jewish heroine right away. Rather, the novel's first chapter focuses on the beloved Arthur Stanley and his adventures through the wilds of Spain:

> A deliciously cool, still evening, had succeeded the intense heat of a Spanish summer day throwing rich shadows and rosy gleams on a wild, rude mountain pass in central Spain. . . . [O]n this particular evening a traveller [sic] there wended his solitary way. His figure was slight . . . and of such graceful agility of movement, that the obstacles in his path . . . appeared by him as unnoticed as unfelt. The deep blue of his broad-rimmed hat could not conceal the deep blue restless eyes, the delicate complexion, and rich brown clustering hair; the varying expression of features, which if not regularly handsome, were bright with intelligence and truth, and betraying like a crystal mirror every impulse of the heart—characteristics both of feature and disposition wholly dissimilar to the sons of Spain. His physiognomy told truth. Arthur Stanley was . . . an Englishman of noble family. (13-14)

Aguilar marks the narrative with Arthur Stanley's journey. Readers begin with him in the fields of Spain, rally for him when he is framed, arrested, and placed on trial for the murder of Marie's husband, and rejoice when he is cleared of the crime and eventually returns to England at the conclusion of the novel. I propose, however, that Marie's romance with Stanley and his three limited appearances in the story

drive the more substantive Jewish narrative forward; his tale makes readers' sympathetic identification with the Jewish Marie Morales possible.

I agree with Michael Ragussis's suggestion that Aguilar "uses the romance between Marie and her English lover to shape the novel for a specifically English audience" (142); but whereas Ragussis sees the story as specifically "organized around a series of trials that test Marie's capacity to withstand the attempt to rewrite her Jewish identity," I interpret the narrative structure as one that is organized around Arthur Stanley's trials to carry Christian readers through the Jewish heroine's story and thus conjure sympathy for Jews while re-educating readers at the same time. Ragussis explains that Marie's trials organize the novel's plot "into three major movements: first, the proposal of marriage from Arthur Stanley. . . second, the public revelation that Marie is a Jew, and her subsequent torture under the Inquisition . . . and finally, the attempt of Queen Isabella to convert Marie, and thereby absorb her into Spanish Catholic society" (142). While these are all essential, defining moments for Marie, I am more concerned with how readers are made receptive to her plight, and thus, able to sympathize with her and her experience as a Jewish woman in medieval Spain. How does their concern for Marie then translate into their further receptiveness to and acceptance of Jews in nineteenth century England?

I contend that Aguilar does not "test" Marie's ability to withstand these trials or conversion as Ragussis suggests; she is able to do so clearly from the moment she

is introduced in chapter two. Rather, Arthur Stanley becomes an essential factor, if not the essential factor, in ushering the Jewish Marie, and thus the Jewish cause as Aguilar had defined it, forward. For Aguilar not only safely maintains "the Jews" within the covers of a book, but she places them within a narrative that begins and ends with an English hero. Aguilar does not betray her heritage or her faith by doing this as critics like Zatlin have argued. On the contrary, Aguilar's narrative strategy is one that consciously eases Christian readers into accepting and perhaps even understanding Marie's strength as a Jewish woman, her commitment to her faith, and, by extension, nineteenth century Jews' commitment to theirs. With the novel's conclusion there is little question that Jews, as Shylock made so exceedingly clear, have "eyes. . . . hands, organs, dimensions, senses, affections, passions . . . [are] fed with the same food, hurt with the same weapons, subject to the same diseases, healed by the same means warmed and cooled by the same winter and summer as a Christian is" (*Merchant* 3.1, 49). Unlike Shakespeare's Shylock and the conversionist renderings of Aguilar's age, she makes clear that Jews do not seek to counter Christian "villainy" with their own evil sorcery or blood-thirsty revenge. Sadly, Marie is aware that she can only secure such a home with death; a sentiment she expresses as she takes her last breath: "In heaven I feel there is no distinction of creed or faith; we shall all love God and one another there, and earth's fearful distinction can never come between us" (248). Marie's words reinforce the

incapability of fifteenth century Spain to achieve this kind of integration. Perhaps nineteenth century England can.

What is at the most basic center of Marie Morales's story is also what drives Grace Aguilar's project: Jews' (individual and communal) struggle with their homelessness and thus their loss of identity as Jews within an anti-Semitic society. *The Vale of Cedars* is a story concerned with unveiling the records of crypto-Jewish life, practices, and persecution in medieval Spain. Aguilar's penetration and presentation of these "imperfect records" are as important to her cause as the fact that she broaches the subject during this time. Aguilar presents a guidebook of sorts for illustrating how inherently prejudiced readers should feel for Marie, how to sympathize with her plight, how to identify her as something more than a stereotyped "Jew," and thus how to integrate her and other Jews within the community.

To accomplish these goals successfully Aguilar first focuses Spain's prejudiced nature on Arthur Stanley as an Englishman on foreign soil. Even though some Spaniards are certain he has been entirely assimilated, like one "Spanish born and bred since he has been in King Ferdinand's service so long and was such a boy when he left England where they had all been busy cutting one another's throats" (75), many more view him as "a foreigner from the Wild Island. . . . There's no taking the foreign blood out of him, try as you will. . . . [T]his [is an] Englisher, with such a white skin and glossy curls, and blue eyes" (75-76). Structurally, this narrative

strategy is effective because readers sympathize with one of their own as the rejected Other; Arthur, the noble Englishman, is on the receiving end of Spain's prejudice and stereotyped assumptions in much the same way that nineteenth century Jews were on the receiving end of conversionist stereotypes and assumptions about their history and their "race." Initially evoking this sympathy for Arthur, then, makes readers more vulnerable to Marie's later peril when her secret Judaism is revealed: "Were Marie one of those base and groveling wretches, those accursed unbelievers, who taint our fair realm with their abhorred rites—think of nothing but gold and usury, and how best to cheat their fellows; hating us almost as intensely as we hate them—why, she should abide by the fate she has drawn upon herself. But . . . [she is] one who has associated so long with zealous Catholics, that she is already most probably one of us" (154). The similarity in the description of these two "others" in Spain, and more particularly that Arthur Stanley is presented first, aides in softening readers' prejudices so they can indeed sympathize with "a Jew," even if only secretly, as they read. For as Judith Page explains in *Imperfect Sympathies*, "people sympathize when they can identify likeness" (89).

Even though readers are brought into the narrative by an Englishman, it soon becomes clear that *The Vale of Cedars* is the heroine's story, the story of a strong and capable "Jewess":

> The exquisite proportions of the rounded figure, the very perfection of each feature, the delicate clearness of the complexion—brunette when brought in close contact with the Saxon, blonde when compared with the Spaniard. . . . Truth, purity, holiness, something scarcely of the nether world, yet blended

> indescribably with all a woman's nature, had rested [in the *expression* of her countenance], attracting the most unobservant, and riveting all whose hearts contained a spark of the same lofty attributes. . . . [Her] clustering tresses . . . fell in all their native richness and raven blackness over her shoulders, parted and braided on her brow, so as to heighten the chaste and classic expression of her features. . . . that beautiful vision must have burst with bewildering power . . . she united *memory* with *being*, the *past* with the *present*, with such an intensity of emotion. . . . (18)

Though seemingly simplistic and idealistic, Aguilar's description is actually more complex. Both brunette and blond, Marie's physical appearance merges the "native richness" and "raven" beauty of the Sephardic-Jewish Other with a face that exudes "classic" features and thus the widely accepted English values, "Truth, purity, holiness." Marie is indeed "something scarcely of the nether world" because she is a kind of Jewish heroine that, literally, had yet been written. She is not weak, malleable, or oppressed by her faith like Shakespeare's Jessica, Bristow's Emma, or as other Christian and conversionist writers had insisted of young Jewish women. Further, that Aguilar uses similar phrasing in her descriptions of Marie and Arthur, who also has a "physiognomy [that] told truth," suggests a deliberate effort to connect the Englishman and "the Jew" directly. Though Marie exhibits physical traits that are decidedly Spanish, there is something recognizable, identifiable, within her—even through her Judaism—that reinforces her similarity to the English hero; she is not entirely foreign in nature to Arthur Stanley and thus not foreign to the nineteenth century English reader either. The narrative environment cannot help but evoke sympathy from the outset because Aguilar constructs a situation in which both the noble Englishman and "the Jew" are on equal footing as others in Spain;

something sets them apart, they are both "bright with intelligence and truth. . . . characteristics . . . wholly dissimilar to the sons of Spain" (14).

The society that Marie and Arthur must confront in *Vale*, as well as the society Aguilar confronts with the actual novel, is clearly defined. Much like her English contemporaries, "[t]he character of the Spaniards—impenetrable and haughty reserve—occasioned, in general, prejudice and dislike towards all foreigners" (14-15). When we meet Marie in chapter two she is shrouded in mystery and by a secret that is ostensibly her downfall; this secret will become the one thing that frees her. Thus, this meeting between Stanley and Marie hints at "the conflict to come" (Regis 31) when Stanley reflects on their initial encounter and her rejection of him several months earlier: "He referred . . . to [Marie's] agonized words, that a union was impossible, that she dared not wed him; it was sin even to love him" (19). Stanley does not understand "why they need part again. . . . what was this fatal secret? Why was it sin to love him?" (19). "The barrier" to their union, though not specifically defined as "Judaism" at this point in the narrative, is alluded to by multiple references to "race," "blood," "prejudice," "aversion," and "scorn"; these are clear indications of the "fatal secret" that will soon be revealed and will keep Marie and Stanley apart. The barrier can be external or internal: "external barriers include elements of the setting, especially the society in power at the beginning of the work . . . and its rules. Elements of internal barriers include the attitudes . . . values, and beliefs held by the heroine and hero that prevent the union. . . . The barrier drives

the romance. . . . Through this element a writer can examine any situation within the heroine's mind or in the world itself" (Regis 32). "[Y]ou shall know this impassioned barrier," cries Marie, "but when the words were said . . . with blanched lips and cheeks, and yet unfaltering tone, Marie revealed the secret which was to separate them for ever" (20). Marie faces both an internal and external barrier: society's rejection of her Judaism—both English and Spanish—prevents her from freely loving Arthur Stanley, and her own internal beliefs (defined by Judaism), also prevent the union. Marie will not defile her faith for the love of a "stranger." Even though Stanley assures her that "race" and "blood" mean nothing to him; that he "would forget, trample on, annihilate the prejudices of [English] life" (21), his inherent prejudice is nevertheless evident as he pleads with Marie to "unite the pure blood of Stanley with the darkened torrent running through thy veins, forget thy race, descent, all but thine own sweet self" (21). What neither the fifteenth century Stanley nor the nineteenth century philo-Semite is able to comprehend is that the very request to "forget thy race"[25] is asking too much. To forego her Judaism, for Marie, for Aguilar, for Jews, is asking Jews to forego their identity. This rejection of self-understanding is not something that Aguilar, or her protagonist Marie, can comprehend or do. When Stanley accuses her of "loving another better" (21), Marie responds with a sense of urgency and decisiveness and clearly marks the issue that will motivate much of the narrative from this point forward: " 'Ay! . . . thou has rightly spoken. . . . There is a love, a duty stronger than that I bear to thee. I would

resign all else, but not my father's God' " (21). Marie's response speaks directly to conversionist claims and literary depictions that Jewish women were easily persuaded and unable to garner strength from their faith on their own. Though Marie thinks she loves Arthur Stanley and struggles with her feelings for him, her duty is first to her faith; it is from here and of her own volition, that she finds the internal strength to persevere through the struggles of a contentious, internal and external, experience.

Michael Ragussis rightly notes that Marie is not only her father's daughter, but she is also "the daughter of the race" (136). However, both Ragussis and Galchinsky agree that Marie's refusal to marry Stanley is the direct result of her father's interference, and that he "enters the love plot to prohibit an intermarriage . . . [that] a battle between father and lover over the possession of the young heroine" (136) ensues because Marie's function as a Jewish daughter is one of "pure instrumentality . . . she serves the critical function of propagating the race and preserving the racial name" (136-137).[26] This interpretation misses the crucial point that Marie rejects Arthur Stanley before her father ever becomes aware of his existence or her feelings for the "stranger." Transferring the ability to make this decision from daughter to father as Ragussis and Galchinsky do strips Marie of the power of her own decision and subtly implies that the Jewish daughter is still weak and unable to find strength on her own as a Jewish woman. That the "survival of [her] minority population is threatened through [her] conversion or, what amounts to the same thing, her intermarriage," as Ragussis goes on to explain, is certainly a

potential danger for Marie, but it is also something that Marie recognizes on her own, not the result of forced intervention by her father. Marie firmly rejects any possibility of a union with Stanley: "The sacrifice . . . of faith, of family, indeed might be made," the narrator tells readers; "but to do this never entered the mind and heart of Marie, so utterly was it impossible. To her peculiar feelings it was sin enough thus to have loved" (37). There is no scene in Aguilar's tale in which the Jewish father feverishly tries to persuade the daughter against marrying the Christian or castigates and banishes her from the family as an apostate like we see in Amelia Bristow's *Emma de Lissau*. While Marie fears her father's reaction should he learn of her sinful love, the narrator nevertheless continually reinforces that the decision to forswear her feelings and thus all ties with Arthur Stanley is Marie's alone. When she finally does reveal the secret relationship, Marie admits: "I have sinned in loving a stranger thus . . . had I been aware of the nature of those feelings, they should never have gained ascendency" (41). Marie's devotion to her faith is reinforced by Stanley's wounded ego at the thought of having lost her to the dictates of her "hated race." Additionally, Stanley's reflections further reveal the deep seated nature of his prejudice against Jews, regardless of his earlier claims to the contrary:

> Perhaps his hope rested on the conviction not so much of his own faithful love as on the unchangeable nature of hers. He might have doubted himself that, wrong as it might be, he could sacrifice every thing for her—country, rank, faith itself, even the prejudice of centuries, every thing but honor—he could not and would not believe that her secret was to her sacred as his honor to him, and that she could no more turn renegade from the fidelity which that secret comprised, than he could from his honor. She had spoken of but one relation, an aged father; and he felt in his strong hopefulness, that it was

> only for that father's sake she had striven to conquer her love, and had told him they might never wed, and that when that link was broken he might win her yet. . . . It was not the mere suffering of unrequited love . . . her secret would flash across him, and the wild thought arise that he [was] victim[ ] to the magic and the sorcery, by means of which alone her hated race could ever make themselves beloved. (76-77)

Stanley's hopes, however, are in vain. For Marie insists that regardless of her father, and contrary to Ragussis's and Galchinsky's interpretation, she would "Never!" "wed the stranger"(41-42).

Even though Marie determines to break all ties with Stanley on her own, her father does maintain a powerful upper-hand when he expresses his hope that she will marry Ferdinand Morales, a first cousin who is also a crypto-Jew and a highly valued and praised servant in the royal court. Though Marie makes clear that she would rather remain unmarried and forswear all love relations, she succumbs to her father's wishes and is married in a secret Jewish ceremony followed by a public wedding "performed in the sight of the whole Catholic world" (43). Marie's decision to marry Ferdinand is essential to showcasing her strength as a woman and a Jew, as well as in countering narratives that married off Jewish maidens to Christian suitors to strip them of their Jewishness. Not only does Marie refuse such a fate and thus the further loss of her Jewish identity on her own, but she recognizes the importance and necessity of a union with a member of her own faith to preserve her endangered heritage. The distinction to be made here, however, is Marie's decision is just that, hers.

Marie's life in the Vale until this point, the quiet privacy with which she lives even though it is an existence shrouded in secrecy, affords her a kind of safety and freedom, albeit restricted. There is a sense of community within this secret world—a sharing in their modified Jewish observances and rituals to the extent that the Vale allows, as well as a level of trust and respect for the family and friends that maintain the secret with her. Marie has little to fear in this environment. The Vale in this regard provides her and the other crypto-Jews with a home and an identity. Once Marie marries Ferdinand Morales, however, there are changes in her position and "her estate, from her lovely home in the Vale of Cedars . . . to the mistress of a large establishment in one of the most populous cities in Castile; the idolized wife of the Governor of the town—and, as such, the object of popular love and veneration, and called upon, frequently, to exert influence and authority" (51). The juxtaposition of her two homes reinforces the crypto-Jewish struggle with self-definition. Marie is no longer surrounded by other crypto-Jews, nor can she count on the privacy of the Vale to protect her or allow her to identify freely with others of the same faith as she once had done. Marie must bury that secret identity even deeper within; and as she moves out of the Vale and assumes the more public role as the Governor's wife, Marie consciously and ironically dons a "double veil" that she "may not lift" for her own and her husband's safety (85). Finding herself in this new position, Marie does

> not fail performing every new duty with a grace and sweetness binding her more and more closely to the doting heart of her husband. . . . but . . . [Marie] constant[ly] thought that she was deceiving him. . . the consciousness, that there was still something to conceal. . . . to one true,

> ingenuous, open as herself, what could be more terrible than the unceasing thought that she was acting a part. (51)

Though Marie has spent a lifetime deceiving soldiers and monarchy by concealing her Judaism and acting the part of a devoted Catholic in Spain, she is nevertheless filled with guilt and shame for keeping this particular secret from her husband and fears his reaction should he ever discover what she perceives as deceit. Also, that Marie does not seem to fear the King and Queen's discovery of her Judaism—of "acting [the] part" of a Catholic—or the consequences that discovery will entail, further reveals the depths to which crypto-Judaism was ingrained in the very survival strategies of its practitioners. Assuming a "double-veil," not revealing the truth concerning her identity and religious belief, is of little mental consequence for Marie because maintaining the secret directly affects her physical livelihood—crypto-Judaism has become part of her identity and essential to her survival as a Jewish woman in fifteenth century Spain. Further, Aguilar's juxtaposing these two secrets—the prideful ease with which Marie carefully maintains her Jewish secret and the shameful sense of deception she feels for keeping the other—subtly reinforces not only her sense of honesty and fidelity to Judaism and humanity in general, but it also represents the Jewish woman as a complex, thinking, feeling individual.

After realizing that her feelings for Arthur were but "passions of youth," Marie recognizes that she does indeed love Ferdinand and confesses: "Oh! my husband, I turn to thee alone, under my God, for rest and peace. . . . I cling to thee now alone—I would be thine alone" (89). With this avowal of truth, "the storm and

dread in Marie's heart" (90), the result of keeping her secret, gave way to "a calm security and peaceful happiness" (90). Marie "felt it had been a secret consciousness of wrong towards her husband . . . now that the ordeal was past, that all was known, and she could meet her husband's eye without one thought concealed; now that despite of all he could love and cherish, aye, trust her still, she clung to him with love as pure and fond and true as ever wife might feel" (91). Initially keeping this secret places Marie in direct opposition to the values, "truth, purity, holiness," the narrator describes as her "classic" (English) nature. That Marie ultimately reveals her secret(s)—first to Ferdinand about Arthur and later to all of Spain about her faith—reinforces that Jews are indeed truthful, pure and holy. Aguilar imbeds Marie's romantic struggles within this pressing message to nineteenth century philo-Semitic readers. And though it seems the result might be a tale that fails as a conventional romantic narrative because the two barriered lovers will never wed—not only will Marie's adherence to her faith keep them apart, but she is devoted to Ferdinand—Aguilar, as I discuss more fully later in this chapter, has a different kind of romance in mind.

Unaware that Ferdinand is also a secret Jew, Stanley believes Marie lied to him regarding the importance of her Jewish ties: "Oh, fool, fool that I was . . . fool, to believe thy specious tale! There could be no cause to part us, else wherefore art thou Morales's wife. . . . [D]idst thou not deceive? Art thou not as perjured . . . as false as thou art lovely?" (84). Marie's response is unapologetic and severe:

"Wouldst thou sink me so low as, even as a wife, to cease to respect me? Rise, Senor Stanley! such posture is unsuited for thee or me; rise, and leave me" (85). Marie's reproach of the Englishman is also Aguilar's. For through this exchange, Aguilar critiques England's lack of respect for Jews, their continual sinking of them "so low"; and, like Marie, makes clear that neither she nor Jews more generally will accept "such posture" from the conversionist community. Though "almost overpowered" by Marie's words, Stanley nevertheless rises with "renewed anger" when he sees Ferdinand: his "sword flew from its scabbard, and in fearful passion he exclaimed. . . . '[H]ear me, Don Ferdinand! . . . I am thy foe! one who hath sworn to take thy life, or lose his own. . . . [S]houldst thou shun me . . . I will track and find thee'. . . . A bitter laugh of scorn concluded these fatal words. He returned his sword violently to its sheath . . . and then all was silent" (85-86). Though the encounter may excite readers on Stanley's behalf against Ferdinand and Marie, or "the Jews," the discovery of Ferdinand's murdered body lying next to an unconscious and bloody Arthur Stanley whose "dress and hands became literrally [sic] dyed with the same hue as the ground" (95), shortly after their encounter sets events in motion that will effectively continue balancing readers' real feelings against Jews with their sympathies. Framed for the murder by the unsavory Don Luis Garcia, Stanley is arrested and placed on trial: "Death to the ungrateful foreigner! . . . Death to the base-born Englishman!" (100) is echoed throughout the halls of the royal court. Aguilar continues to use Stanley's otherness to gain sympathy for Jews and to manipulate those sympathies so

readers will rally for Marie in much the same way they rally for Stanley when the cries calling for the death of "the base-born Englishman" turn into cries calling for death to the "base-born" Jew.

Until this point, Aguilar has effectively used the relationship between Stanley and Marie as a catalyst to evoke sympathy for "others" while also countering the widely held conversionist belief that Jewish women are easily swayed from their faith and thus the most effective means to penetrate and "save" the Jewish community. Yet Marie Morales does not abandon her devotion to Judaism as Stanley hopes. Unlike Bristow's Emma, Aguilar's Marie needs not the Christian (savior) to secure her happiness and her sense of self. That Marie is supported by her faith in this way, however, does not mean she is free from pressure to convert. However, with Ferdinand's murder, Marie's initial resolve to remain true to her "father's God" in the face of romantic temptation evolves into a source of internal power and determination stronger than any inquisitorial torture device that will be used against her later.

In order to uncover the mystery surrounding Ferdinand's murder and the guilt or innocence of the accused, Marie "*must* take part" in [Stanley's] trial, either in public or private; she *must* speak on oath, for life and death hang on her words" (118). Having overheard Stanley's earlier threat against her husband, Marie knows that confirming the charge against him "as being and having been the acknowledged enemy of the deceased Don Ferdinand Morales . . . and as having uttered words of

murderous import in her hearing" (120) will "speak his doom. . . . [T]hose fatal words . . . must condemn him" (121). However, Stanley's guilt or innocence seems almost inconsequential to the internal conflict Aguilar creates by making readers contend with the possibility that Stanley may be executed for the murder of "a Jew." Other than Marie, only readers are aware of Ferdinand's secret faith. All of Spain, including the King, Queen, and Stanley, believed (and continue to believe) Ferdinand was a devoted and beloved Catholic servant. Further, Marie's power to save or condemn Stanley heightens the sense of conflict for the reader. Thus, readers rally for Marie almost by default at first because she becomes the key to saving Stanley. Perhaps she will lie for Stanley regarding the threat she heard him make against Ferdinand's life; if she can keep her faith so successfully secret, why not Stanley's words as well? However, the crypto-Jewish lie was a necessary one for Marie's survival. It is clear, as I discuss above, that Marie is unable to deceive in any other regard. Stanley's murder trial, then, becomes another instance in which the noble Englishman will cull sympathy from readers for the Jewess. Convinced that Stanley is innocent of the crime, Marie cannot speak a truth that will wrongly condemn him nor can she lie for him. Faced with this conflict, Marie chooses to martyr herself by speaking the only truth that can set Stanley free. Though it is a choice that will physically imprison her, Marie's decision to sacrifice herself for Stanley's freedom emotionally and spiritually frees her from the bondage of her

crypto-Jewish life. It is also a sacrifice that Aguilar's Christian readers will understand.

While she never reveals the secret faith of her murdered husband, Marie literally removes the double-veil she assumed when she married him: "on partially removing her veil, to permit a clear view of the scene around her, [Marie's] sweet face was disclosed to all—profoundly, almost unnaturally, calm, indeed" (143). With the gravity of the moments in front of her weighing heavily, and the knowledge that "many tongues will speak their scorn and condemnation" (124), Marie reaffirms that her "strength will not fail" (143) as Father Francis rises with a "large and richly embossed silver crucifix" to administer the sacred oath (see Figure 2):

> "Marie Henriquez Morales," he said, as he reverentially held the solemn symbol of his religion before her. . . . "[S]wear to speak the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. Swear by the Holy Symbol which I support; by the unpronounceable name of the Father, by the flesh and blood, the resurrection and the life of our Lord and Saviour Christ Jesu; by the Holy spirit; by the saving and glorious Trinity; by the goodly army of Saints and Martyrs; daughter, swear, and the blessing or the curse be with you as you swear true or falsely." (144)

As Father Francis concludes, Marie, without a moment's pause to consider the consequences of her words, firmly responds:

> "Reverend Father . . . I am grateful for thy counsel; and believe me, am well advised of the truth and solemnity of the words I speak. But I cannot aid his Grace, and these his subjects, in their decision as to the prisoner's sentence. My evidence is valueless. I belong to that race whose word is never taken as witness, for or against, in any court of justice. I cannot take the oath required, for I deny the faith in which it is administered. I am a JEWESS!" (144-145)

Having kept her Jewish faith hidden since birth, Marie, and other crypto-Jews like her, had essentially perfected the co-existence of their dual lives as secret Jews and outward Catholics. Why does she sacrifice her safety as well as the safety of other crypto-Jews by revealing her "fatal secret" at all, and particularly in this way? "[W]as it not madness . . . thus publicly to avow a determined heresy, and expose herself to all the horrors of the church's vengeance!" (153) wonders King Ferdinand. At a loss for her motivation to speak in this manner, Stanley cries "Marie! Marie! . . . Oh why hast thou done this? Why not take the required oath, and condemn me at once? Marie, I am unworthy of such self-sacrifice!" (145). Aguilar initially implies that Stanley, and thus England, are indeed unworthy, for they had been guilty of prejudice and crimes

Figure 2: 1893 George Routledge & Sons edition; Dalziel Brothers and H. Anelay's illustration of Marie's testimony at Arthur Stanley's trial.

against the Jews long before Spain had expelled them from her shores. Like much of the novel, however, Marie's avowal is laced with double-meaning.

Galchinsky explains that Marie's decision to remove her veil suggests to readers that her "willingness to martyr herself (and potentially her community) for the sake of the Englishman is Aguilar's clear response to the antiemancipationists . . . who argued that Jew's loyalty to Zion would detract from their loyalty to England" (165). This issue was much debated in 1831 when Aguilar began writing *Vale*. William Hazlitt, for example, addressed the anti-emancipationist argument as unwarranted and grounded in little more than the Christian "bedrid imagination" of fear in his "Emancipation of the Jews," written the same year. Thomas Babington Macaulay similarly argues in his 1831 "Speech on Jewish Disabilities" that the intolerance the English nation continues to harbor against Jews in keeping them from Parliament for the "good of England" is "arbitrary" and no less injurous than "those persecutors who use the rack and the stake" (qtd in Galchinsky 379). Aguilar clearly imbeds a sense of English nationhood within the Jewish woman whose "countenance bespoke truth" in her own bid to counter the anti-emancipation position. Beyond the freeing of the noble Englishman, however, is a kind of freeing of greater import: Marie is freed from the secrecy of her double-veiled, crypto-Jewish life. Her seemingly self-damning avowal ironically saves Marie from the looming sense of homelessness, and thus loss of identity; though she suffers to a degree just by being a Jew in Spain during this time, Marie's loss was already amplified by the

death of first her father and then her husband. Additionally, Marie's determination to reject every kind of conversion attempt from those grounded in hate and torture to those of sympathy and love, "her discovery of dignity and purpose in living as a Jew," explains Ragussis, "becomes the cornerstone of a historical commentary on why and how the Jewish woman played a role in preserving that Judaic heritage" (146). Further, when given the option of "a lesser trial" in private and "on oath to thy Queen alone. . . . as if thy testimony were received in public" (122), Marie chooses the public forum "with dignity and fearlessness"; she insists that she will "appear at to-morrow's trial! . . . it is fixed unalterably" (123). Not only does Aguilar show the Jewess's willingness to sacrifice herself for the Englishman and thus English nationhood, but Marie also attempts to break through the prejudiced constructs of a society that has essentially forced her into oppressive secrecy her entire life. Like nineteenth century England, her society clearly wants little interaction with her as a Jew beyond effecting her conversion or death: "Father Francis staggered back [from Marie] . . . as if there were contamination in remaining by her side" (145). That Aguilar draws a Jewish woman who insists on "testifying" in this public way—when the consequences for doing so meant death—further comments on Aguilar's desire for Anglo-Jews to claim their Jewish identity and live openly as such in England. Marie sets an example, albeit a sacrificing and redemptive one, but she is an example nonetheless of Jewish strength, pride and devotion for nineteenth century Jews.

Though romantic elements are woven throughout the novel, Aguilar becomes decidedly focused on developing Marie's relationship to and interaction with conversion tactics, that is, conversion either through persecution and torture or through sympathy and love. As I have discussed, Aguilar's push toward the advancement of Jewish acceptance results, at least partially, from contemporary society's reliance on fifteenth century Spanish models to buttress their more (self-declared) sympathetic philo-Semitic actions. Though Iberian anti-Judaism dates back much earlier, nineteenth century England's philo-Semitic mission to the Jews was particularly obsessed with Ferdinand and Isabella. The remainder of Marie's story hinges on her relationship with Isabella and the fictional Don Luis Garcia, the embodiment of inquisitorial persecution and torture. Aguilar not only romanticizes Judaism as a means of educating readers about Jewish history, but she revises elements of that history in her delineations of Ferdinand and Isabella in relationship to Garcia to comment on and perhaps even change nineteenth century philo-Semitic ideology. Thus, Marie's declaration of faith dramatically shifts the narrative from an overt historical romance to a commentary on nineteenth century philo-Semitism. What emerges from Marie's experiences throughout the rest of the tale is both a historical commentary on Spain's exploits against the Jews as well as Aguilar's own pointed critique of England's philo-Semitic commitment to convert them.

"The Bad Converted"

> Are we to see a young and unhappy being perish for want of sympathy and succor, because—forsooth—she is a Jewess? Danger to our soul! We should indeed fear it; did we leave her to die without one effort to restore health to the frame, and the peace of Christ to the mind!
>
> —Aguilar's Queen Isabella in *The Vale of Cedars*

> [T]he plotting and characterization of the Victorian novel often invite[s] readers to examine their prejudices, and to discover and affirm, along with the hero or heroine, any appropriate personal, moral and spiritual value system by which to live in the modern world.
>
> —Hilary Fraser, "The Victorian Novel and Religion"

Marie's avowal, "I am a Jewess," marks the beginning of her "rebirth" and also solidifies her immediate fate. The gravity of her situation is heightened and fully realized when Don Garcia kidnaps Marie shortly after her admission and carries out his own inquisitorial torture for her "heresy" and further refusal to name other secret Jews. Marie's "rebirth," or metamorphosis, from a woman grounded by her own secret identity, to one on a quest to acknowledge her identity as a Jew freely is directly tied to those who seek to convert her. Though a "Spaniard of noble birth . . . . [T]here was no lack of personal attractions or mental graces, to account for the universal, yet unspoken and unacknowledged dislike which [Don Luis Garcia] inspired. . . . Austere, even rigid, in . . . his religion. . . . the populace declared him faultless, as a Catholic. . . . No feeling, with him, was of an evanescent nature: under the cold austerity of the ordinary man, lay coals of thriving fire. It mattered not under what guise excited—hate, revenge, ambition, he was capable of all" (52-53), and "skilled in every art of evil" (54).

Marie is no longer the frightened Jew hiding behind her veil of Catholic secrecy. Her transformation is evident as Garcia threatens continued torture:

> "I tell thee, pain of itself has never yet had power to kill; and we have learned the measure of endurance in the human form so well, that we have never yet been checked by death, ere our ends were gained. And so will it be with thee . . . . Thou has but tasted pain!" [said Garcia.]
>
> "Better the sharpest torture than thy hated presence," calmly rejoined Marie. "My soul thou canst not touch."
>
> "Soul! Has a Jewess a soul? Nay, by my faith, thou talkest bravely! . . . thou hadst best . . . share my salvation; there's none for such as thee."
>
> "Share thy salvation! Great God of Israel! that men like these have power to persecute thy children for their faith, and do it in thy name! And speak of mercy! Thou hast but given me another incentive for endurance," [Marie] continued. . . . "If salvation be denied to us, and granted thee, I would refuse it with my dying breath; such faith is not of God! . . . Back," exclaimed the heroic girl. "Advance one step nearer, and thy vengeance, even as thy passion, will alike be foiled—and may God forgive the deed I do. . . . Thou mayest kill my body, but thou canst not pollute my soul." (179-180, 182)

Marie vanquishes death in both her defiance of Garcia's determination to convert her through torture, as well as what will later be Queen Isabella's softer, though no less trying, attempt to sway her. As Michael Ragussis explains conversion to Christianity for crypto-Jews was "nothing more than a masked form of banishment so radical that death is its clearest analogue" (42). By steadfastly maintaining her faith and denouncing all conversion attempts, Marie does indeed "keep alive." Her physical body is near death and an arm rendered useless after Garcia's torture when she is rescued by her Uncle Julien who is also a secret Jew and one of the founders of the Vale of Cedars. But Marie's refusal to relinquish her faith, her survival and escape

from Garcia's secret chambers, becomes one of two instances in which she "overthrows" death and "wins life."

Not only does she refute the conversionist notion that Jewish women are weak and malleable with Marie's victory over Garcia, but Aguilar also constructs a history that, while fully exploring Spain's exploits against the Jews and revealing the secretive nature of crypto-Judaism, paints a sympathetic portrait of Ferdinand and Isabella. The relationship that Aguilar establishes between Marie Morales and Queen Isabella is one that never would have taken place during the Inquisition—a time that sought to eliminate Jews, particularly secret Jews, from Spain. Aguilar's sympathetic rendering counters the generally held belief that Isabella "waged warfare against the devil and those instruments of his, the Jews."[27] As is well-documented by many historians like Cecil Roth, Benjamin Netanyahu, Peggy Liss, and Haim Beinart, Isabella was committed to "emptying Spain of Jews[28] and she took a vow, long before she came into power, that "should she reach the throne she would devote herself heart and soul to the extirpation of heresy and the persecution of the Jews."[29] Aguilar describes a King and Queen who show love and devotion to a Jewish maiden. Isabella is not merciless in Aguilar's Spain; she is rather a woman with almost unnatural sympathy for the Jewish daughter's plight. This revision of history has for the most part gone unnoticed in the few critical treatments of the novel. Though Michael Galchinsky briefly references it as an oddity in *Origins*, he does not go beyond commenting on the strangeness of the revision.[30] Annette Goodman, in a

1930 "Note," praises Aguilar's work on behalf of the Jewish community and also comments on her revision of Isabella's character:

> The book by which [Grace Aguilar] should be remembered for all time is undoubtedly "The Vale of Cedars," which deals with the Jews of Spain under the Inquisition. Marie Morales, the martyr heroine, is brought into close contact with Isabella of Spain, of who is drawn a character study untrammeled by the prejudices which we as Jews naturally feel to the one who signed the edicts permitting the operation of the Spanish Inquisition, and finally the expulsion of the Jews from Spain. Though she felt the keenest indignation at the horrors to which her ancestors were submitted, Grace Aguilar absolves Isabella from much blame. . . . Her vindication of Isabella's character would horrify those who cannot penetrate beneath the surface, but Grace Aguilar could and did. Therein lies the secret of her greatness. . . . No student of the Jews in Spain can afford to disregard this book which shows us so ably the effect of persecution on they typical Jewish martyr.[31]

In revising Isabella in this way, and taken in conjunction with Don Luis Garcia and his actions, Aguilar has outlined England's own philo-Semitic ideology and its self-declared opposition to inquisitorial persecution. England may pride itself on the sympathy with which it acts, but in Aguilar's estimation those actions are no less dangerous than Garcia's medieval torture chamber. If we view Isabella's sympathetic nature as a kind of early or un-refined philo-Semitism when set against Garcia's overt violence, then Aguilar's delineation of a sympathetic Queen functions as a commentary directly addressed to nineteenth century conversionists who prided themselves on the sympathy and kindness they showed Jews in opposition to barbarous Spain. Take for example, Isabella's insistence that her servants care for the bewildered Marie after she testifies at Stanley's trial: "I bid thee abhor her faith," the Queen insists; "but seek to win her to the right path, by gentleness and love, not

prejudice and hate" (157). Aguilar's Isabella echoes, nearly verbatim, the language and tone of many of the nineteenth century British conversionists and evangelical preachers I quote throughout these chapters—Reverend Burder, for example, above. Situating what I call this philo-Semitic slogan—"sympathy and love, not prejudice and hate"— with Isabella's character forces an otherwise covert missionary operation into a very public foreground. While it could be argued that placing the power of these words and the movement itself within Isabella's hands empowers the philo-Semitic mission, just the opposite is the case. Not only do nineteenth century missionary societies claim to despise the Spanish, but they have created an entire conversionist industry based on "love," in direct opposition to the barbarity of the historical Isabella and Catholic Spain. Thus, associating this philo-Semitic power with Isabella not only unveils its subversiveness, but it also forces Aguilar's philo-Semitic readers to associate their actions with something to loathe, criticize, and perhaps even cease, rather than embrace. As a stereotyped philo-Semitic mouthpiece, Aguilar's Isabella captures the essence of the conversionist movement during her own time. In much the same way she attempts to re-educate Jews in the spirit and practices of their faith with her earlier descriptions of Sukkot, Aguilar also tries to show readers, or "reflect black" as Galchinsky terms it, the inquisitorial nature of philo-Semitic ideology. In other words, there is little distinction to be made between Queen Isabella of fifteenth century Spain and conversionists of nineteenth century England.

Aguilar exemplifies for readers the "kindness" with which conversionists exercised their deceit over Jews. However, Marie will not falter. Aguilar will not allow Isabella's rhetoric of conversion to gain sway over Marie's Jewish faith:

> She rose slowly, and stood before the Sovereign. . . . "It is over," she said at length, and her usually sweet voice sounded harsh and unnatural. . . . "gracious Sovereign, condemn, scorn, hate me as thou wilt, thou must: I must endure it till my heart breaks, and death brings release; but the word thou demandest I *cannot* speak! . . . 'Tis the bidding of my God, and he will stregthen me to bear it. Imprison, torture, slay, with the lingering misery of a broken heart, but I cannot deny my faith!" (232)

The Vale of Cedars will not end like the Christian tales about Jews that came before; the Jewish maiden will not be converted, nor will she flee. Instead, Marie will return to her childhood home in the Vale to live out her final days:

> "I ask nothing—nothing, but to return to my childhood's home, and die there! . . . in my own isolated home . . . I can do harm to none—mingle with none. . . . I will swear to thee never to quit that place of banishment—swear never more to mingle with either thy people or with mine—to be as much lost to man, as if the grave had already closed over me. . . . Oh, Madam! grant me but this! . . . Leave me, oh! leave me but my faith—the sole joy, sole hope, now left me!" (233-234)

What the novel makes clear is that Marie (and by extension nineteenth century Jews) values her Jewish identity and freedom to live (and die) as a Jew beyond any protection or "love" Queen Isabella could provide should she convert. The implication for readers then, becomes an important one. If Marie can survive pressure from the almighty Isabella on her terms, if she can summon the strength to reject conversion efforts from this force, then nineteenth century Jews can empower themselves to do the same in the face of lesser trials. Further, Marie defeats both

Isabella's philo-Semitic attempts at gaining her conversion as well as Garcia's overt brutality, and she remains grounded in and true to her faith in the end. In doing so, she suggests that neither the threat of physical torture and death nor the more sensitive and sympathetic efforts of a Queen and King could convert her. What does this security of belief mean for both Aguilar's Christian and Jewish readers? Most importantly, Aguilar clearly shows that neither the all-powerful Spain, nor the more cunning and deceptive England, can gain sway over the conscientious, educated, and self-loving Jew.

Marie rejects attempts at conversion and the imposition of religious hegemony. Though she is "freed" to return to her childhood home in the Vale as a Jew, Marie's freedom is nevertheless limited because she cannot function as a participating member of society. However, though confined, Marie is home—"being home" according to Martin and Mohanty, not the illusory home that conversion or assimilation would afford. This freedom comes from both the sparing of Marie's life and from her faith. Thus, Marie's return to the Vale signals her freedom from the constant fear of conversion, as well as from the emotional and psychological imprisonment of crypto-Judaism; her faith is no longer a secret.

Aguilar's tale, while painting a picture of the forbidden love shared between the crypto-Jewish Marie Morales and the English Arthur Stanley, becomes a Jewish heroine's quest to identify and freely own her Jewish faith. Marie's freedom is realized when she confidently reveals the truth and sheds her Catholic mask: "I am a

Jewess!" Though the avowal is made initially to save Arthur Stanley from death, Marie nevertheless lifts her Catholic veil and is freed; she gains further strength in the outward ownership of her Judaism. This strength is reinforced when, at the end of the novel, in a bid to convince Marie to convert, Queen Isabella makes a union between Marie and Arthur Stanley possible. However, it is not the Englishman that Marie chooses when given the opportunity. As in the beginning, Marie chooses her faith; she essentially weds her Judaism—here is the romance of Aguilar's novel. It is a romance Grace Aguilar wants nineteenth century Anglo-Jews to have with both their history and their faith—to rekindle for Jews after centuries of persecution and forced conversions, baptisms, and secret observances, the spirit of their faith, the spirit of Judaism and thus the public ownership of their Jewish identity.

However, Aguilar does not entirely absolve Isabella from all prosecutory wrongs committed against medieval Spanish Jews by revising her character in this way:

> though under her individual character was the noblest, the most magnanimous, the most complete union of masculine intellect with perfect womanhood, ever traced on the pages of the past; though under her public administration her kingdom stood forth the noblest, the most refined, most generous, ay, and the freest, alike in national position, as in individual sentiment, amongst all the nations of Europe, Isabella's was the fated hand to sign two edicts, whose consequences extinguished the luster, diminished the virtues, enslaved the sentiments, checked the commerce, and in a word deteriorated the whole character of Spain. (159)

Even though she is sympathetic, noble, intelligent—not unlike Aguilar's English readers—Isabella is still prejudiced and, no matter how soft her action, that prejudice

"like the spider"[32] corrupts Spain. So too can the philo-Semitism of nineteenth century England.

Safe in the Vale and in her faith, and nearing death, Marie makes a final request: "'Uncle Julien . . . thou wilt not refuse to clasp hands with one who has so loved Marie! And thou, Arthur, oh! Scorn him not. Without him the invisible dungeons of the Inquisition would have been my grave, and thine that of a dishonored knight and suspected murderer.' The eyes of her companions met, and their hands were grasped in that firm pressure, betraying unity of feeling, and reciprocal esteem, which need no words" (248). As Marie passes the narrator poignantly describes the scene: "Julien Morales and Arthur Stanley—the aged and the young—the Jewish recluse and Christian warrior—knelt side by side on the cold earth, which concealed the remains of one to both so expressly dear. . . . [T]hen both arose and advanced to the barrier wall; the spring answered to the touch, and the concealed door flew back. The young Christian turned, and was folded to the heart of the Jew" (251). Aguilar literally knocks down "the barrier wall" between Christians and Jews. There is still a hint of Christian unwillingness to let down prejudicial defenses because it is the Jew that embraces the Christian not the other way around. Nevertheless, Arthur Stanley, the noble Englishman, is willing to extend his hand in return. This novel is successful because Marie has in fact conquered a society and a queen that would otherwise have put her to death for her

religion. By extension, she has literally effected the knocking down of walls between Christians and Jews.

I agree with Galchinsky's contention that Aguilar "assimilates the structure of the conversionist romance plot . . . to alter its vision of Jewish women and its "illiberal" conclusion" (*Origins* 165); but, I expand the point to include Aguilar's desire to recount the history of crypto-Judaism and thus alter the misinformed interpretation of Jews generally. Further, I disagree with Galchinsky's claim that Aguilar's "transformation of the genre is an emblem for what Victorian Jews were trying to do in general: to adopt, as far as possible, the habits and customs of their Christian neighbors while maintaining a thriving subculture with a distinct collective identity" (165). Even though many nineteenth century Jews tried to assimilate into Christian culture, it is important to distinguish Aguilar's position from what Jews did in reality. She does call on Jews to maintain their distinct identity as Jews; however, adopting "as far as possible" specifically Christian habits and customs would, according to Aguilar, inhibit Jews' ability to maintain that distinct identity. As I have discussed, Aguilar wages a kind of literary war against assimilation of any kind; her position regarding Jews and Judaism was clearly grounded in her steadfast determination to prevent Jews from either internalizing and adopting Christian habits or from hiding their Jewish identity. What is perhaps the most essential element of Aguilar's argument on behalf of integration rests in her belief that like

their Christian friends, Jews were also "English men and English women," distinct only in creed. This commonality is something even many conversionists recognized:

> Are not the Jews in England a component part of the subjects of our own empire? Do they not profess allegiance to the British crown? Are they not contributors to Britain's wealth and prosperity? As fellow-subjects, do we not owe them much good will? [and here is the all-important caveat] On Christian principles, do we not owe them our best and kindest wishes, our best and kindest efforts to bring them to the faith of Christ, that they may be fellow citizens with the saints and of the household of God?[33]

Because both creeds contribute as members of English culture, Aguilar, unlike the conversionists, maintains that there need not be any difficulty in the two religions "joining hands"; Jews "never attempt the fearful system of interfering with other religions, or to seek to turn man from his own faith" (*Jewish Faith* 164) she argues, and neither should Christians. Had Aguilar written "Christian men and Christian women" her position would resonate quite differently. As an author consumed by and with the power of language, Aguilar is meticulous in her word choice and very careful not to interchange "Christian" and "English" throughout her various works; doing so would certainly have altered the meaning of her position regarding integration. Galchinsky ultimately confirms my position when he explains that Aguilar "believes Jews and Christians share the same principles, [but] . . . believes that Jews deserve their own reformed set of rituals and cultural life. And she sets out to suggest this duality . . . in her own romances" (164). It is difficult to reconcile this argument—one that Aguilar certainly maintains throughout her narratives—with Galchinsky's later contention that Aguilar's fiction was emblematic of Victorian Jews'

desire "to adopt, as far as possible, the habits and customs of their Christian neighbors" (165). Even though Aguilar is certainly a difficult author to define at times, her position against assimilation of this kind is clear and Marie Morales is a distinctly Jewish heroine who exemplifies the point.

The closing pages of Aguilar's histories capture her rejection of conversion and assimilation, but none perhaps as forcefully as "The Escape." Having been discovered and threatened with death, the Jewish exiles flee their Spanish home and sail toward freedom in England; they "gazed for the last time on the land they loved . . . . [T]he shores of Spain stood forth bathed in a glow of warm red light, as if to bid the unhappy wanderers farewell in unrivaled brilliance" (78-79). As silence falls over the ship, the "fugitives" contemplate their past and move toward their future with a "wild and wailing burst simultaneously . . . the young and the old—the strong man and exhausted female—joined almost unconsciously. In the language of Jerusalem they chanted forth their wild farewell" (79).[34] Having recast Sephardic history in *The Vale of Cedars* and other tales, Aguilar, like her Spanish exiles, bids farewell to the inhumanity, persecution, and secrecy of the past and welcomes the potential for freedom and opportunity in her present England. With *The Perez Family*, the first story written about Anglo-Jews by a Jew,[35] Aguilar escorts readers from the doorstep of the Jewish past into the present nineteenth century Anglo-Jewish home. It is a new chapter for Aguilar, for Jews, and for the British nation.

Notes

1. Though no date is provided, this review would not have been written prior to 1850 with the novel's publication. It is included with others at the conclusion of Groombridge and Sons' edition of *The Women of Israel*.

2. Review. *Bell's Weekly Messenger*. Ibid.

3. See "The Obligations of Christians to Labor for the Conversion of the Jews" in *Lectures on the Conversion of the Jews*.

4. Review. *Critic*. No date provided, included at the conclusion of Groombridge and Sons' edition of *The Women of Israel*.

5. Review. *Bucks Chronicle*. Ibid.

6. See Galchinsky, *Selected Writings* (introduction) and Valman, "Women Writers and the Campaign for Jewish Civil Rights in Early Victorian England" (100); and Ragussis, *Figures of Conversion* (chapter 4). Aguilar was writing *Vale* in what was commonly referred to as the age of the historical novel—founded by Maria Edgeworth (though she is most commonly associated with domestic and moral tales) and most notably associated with Walter Scott. While Aguilar admires them as writers and was inspired by the genres they worked in, she nevertheless explains that "something more is wanting," that Scott and Edgeworth are "moral, not spiritual." See *Women of Israel*, 574. Though *The Vale of Cedars* is indeed a historical novel, Aguilar uses the genre in conjunction with romance and conversion elements to redefine Jews' position in England and criticize the philo-Semitic mission in her own nineteenth century society.

7. *The Vale of Cedars*, 23.

8. No date provided, included at the conclusion of Groombridge and Sons' edition of *The Women of Israel*.

9. *The Occident and American Jewish Advocate* 2.4 (1844).

10. Review of the *Records of Israel*. *The Occident and American Jewish Advocate* (July 1844).

11. Editorial Correspondence. *The Occident and American Jewish Advocate* (October 1844).

12. Ibid

13. Editorial Correspondence. *The Occident and American Jewish Advocate* (October 1844).

14. Aguilar footnotes several histories throughout the novel including Stockdale's *History of the Inquisition*, Gibbon's *Decline and Fall*, and John Bigland's *History of Spain*. That Aguilar quotes these historians is important, particularly for Christian readers who might not "believe" the facts of crypto-Jewish history that she recounts. Philo-Semites were making up Jewish history themselves, what was to keep them from thinking Aguilar was doing the same.

15. Aguilar inserts the following footnote here: "Basnage asserts that the Jews were introduced into Spain by the fleet of Solomon, and the arms of Nebuchadenzzar, and that Hadrian transported *forty thousand* families of the tribe of Judah, and ten thousand of the tribe of Benjamin, etc" (169).

16. Though truncated, Aguilar nevertheless captures the prosecutorial, prejudice nature of the 1492 Edict here. See Haim Beinart's *The Expulsion of the Jews From Spain* (49-54) for original text and translation. The following is Aguilar's summary as read by a Spanish officer in the narrative:

> "From the most high and mighty sovereigns, Ferdinand and Isabella, joint sovereigns of Arragon and Castile, to whose puissant arms the grace of God hath given dominion over all the heretics and unbelievers, before whose banner of the Holy Cross the Moorish abominations have crumbled into dust—to our loyal subjects of every principality and province, of every rank, and stage, and calling, of every grade, and every state, these—to which we charge you all in charity give good heed.
>
> Whereas we have heard and seen, that the Jews of our states induce many Christians to embrace Judaism, particularly he nobles of Andalusia; for THIS they are BANISHED from our domains. Four months from this day, we grant them to forswear their abominations and embrace Christianity, or to depart; pronouncing DEATH on every Jew found in our kingdom after that allotted time.
>
> (*Signed*) FERDINAND AND ISABELLA.
> Given at our palace of Segovia this thirtieth day of March, of the year of grace one thousand, four hundred and ninety two."

17. Editorial Correspondence. *The Occident and American Jewish Advocate* (October 1844). It is interesting to note the way Aguilar's own confidence in her project has grown in only two years. She did not respond to Leeser and Franklin publically after their critiques of her *Spirit of Judaism*—as I explain in the previous chapter, she kept her frustration regarding their comments private, only discussing her thoughts with family members and in correspondence with the Cohen's. Here, however, Aguilar not only takes a stand against Leeser and Franklin, but she does so by writing to *The*

Occident and critiquing both Leeser and Franklin publically.

18. "Progress of Literature Among the Jews." *The Jewish Chronicle* 7.2 (1850): 9-10.

19. In *Radical Assimilation in English Jewish History*, Todd Endelman explains that while both Ashkenazi and Sephardi Jews immigrated to England between 1656 and 1837, the majority of Jewish immigrants leading up to this time were Sephardic with crypto-Jewish ties to Spain and Portugal. See chapter one, 9-33.

20. September 29.

21. From Lord Byron's "Were My Bosom as False as Thou Deem'st It To Be" in *Hebrew Melodies*. Aguilar quotes the third full stanza of the poem at the beginning of chapter 31 in *Vale*:

> I have lost for that Faith more than thou canst bestow,
> As the God who permits thee to prosper doth know.
> In His hand is my heart, and my hope; and in thine
> The land, and the life, which for Him I resign. (221)

22. Review, *The Vale of Cedars*. *Graham's American Monthly Magazine of Literature, Art, and Fashion* 37 (1850): 324.

23. While Regis's book deals with the romance genre, not historical romance (for the definition of historical romance under which I am working see my chapter 2, 128 n27), her discussion is useful in clarifying how Aguilar uses the love relationship between Marie Morales and Arthur Stanley as a narrative device to evoke sympathy for Jews and Judaism from non-Jewish readers.

24. Regis counters the two major critical charges against romance that suggest the genre both extinguishes its own heroine, confining her within a story that ignores the full range of her concerns and abilities, and denies her independent goal-oriented action outside of love or marriage. Romance "muffles the main female character," questions the validity of her "quest," and thus binds readers in their own marriages or encourages them to get married by equating marriage with success and further glorifying sexual difference (10).

25. Significantly Aguilar repeats the words "race" and "blood" here, as well as throughout her other fictional works. Of particular importance is that only Aguilar's non-Jewish characters—Arthur Stanley, King Ferdinand, Queen Isabella, and Don Luis Garcia for example—use the terms. Whereas Jewish characters like Marie Morales always speak of their "father's God," "creed," or "faith" when referencing their heritage or Jews more generally. Galchinsky explains that "early and mid-Victorian novelists [who] contributed to the conversionist effort . . . seldom

articulated a racial discourse about Jewishness. . . . In numerous conversionist romances, the price Jewish heroines had to pay for full integration into English life was their conversion to Christianity. Their race was not an issue. . . . Beginning in the 1880s, an increasingly prevalent view of Jews' racial inferiority was articulated in the discourses. . . . Jews were generally classified as "Semites" or "Orientals," and were thus treated under the same non-Caucasian racial rubrics as Arabs and Indians" (172-173). However, that Aguilar's Christian and Catholic characters all refer to Jews in racial terms suggests that while "racial distinction" might have become more prevalent later in the century, the seeds of the discourse had been planted much earlier. Racism "often surrounded the ideology of conversion in general and 'the Jewish question' in particular"(24), explains Michael Ragussis. Early nineteenth century England promoted "a particular strand of English racist discourse"(25). The tales and historical romances written about Jews between 1830 and 1860 "became a means of exploring urgent issues of racial difference and national identity in Victorian England"(128). By placing the language of race in specifically English (Protestant) and Spanish (Catholic) mouths, Aguilar clearly addresses the racial tension underscoring conversionist rhetoric that used Spanish history to promote philo-Semitic ideology. While Aguilar insisted that "Jews and Christians were equal in spirit" (Galchinsky 175), I am apprehensive to agree that she "did not foresee the racial turn that British politics would take in the late Victorian period" (Galchinsky 172). As I discuss in the next chapter, Aguilar rejects the notion that Jews are racially different. However, her preoccupation with the language, at the very least, suggests perhaps that she was one of the first to publically counter what, by later in the century, would become claims of not only religious otherness but of racial otherness. See Galchinsky, "Permanently Blacked," and Ragussis, *Figures of Conversion*.

26. Galchinsky also argues in *Origins* that "Aguilar's Jewish daughters do not come into conflict with their fathers, even when they fall in love with Christian suitors, because they sacrifice their desires at their fathers' first word for the sake of the community's safety and integrity. The absence of the father/daughter struggles in Aguilar means that the daughters do not gain the same degree of independence from their fathers. And because they marry men of their fathers' choosing, they do not gain parity with their husbands" (161).

27. See Peggy Liss's *Isabel the Queen: Life and Times*, 264.

28. Ibid

29. See Cecil Roth's *The Spanish Inquisition*, 41.

30. See *Origins*, 244n58.

31. See Annette Goodman's "Grace Aguilar. A Note." *Jewish Chronicle Supplement* (1930).

32. Hazlitt, "Emancipation of the Jews"

33. From an 1843 Lecture: "The Encouragements Which Christians Have to Undertake the Conversion of the Jews" given by the Reverend James C. Burns before the British Society for the Propagation of the Gospel Among the Jews." See *Lectures on the Conversion of the Jews*. New York: The American Society for the Melioration of the Condition of the Jews, 1846. 17.

34. The "fugitives" chant the following as they sail toward freedom, (79-80):

Farewell! farewell! we wander forth.
Doom'd by th' Eternal's awful wrath;
With nought to bless our lonely path,
        Across the stormy wave.
Cast forth as wanderers on the earth;
'Torn from the land that hailed our birth;
From childhood's cot, from manhood's hearth,
        From temple and from grave.

Farewell! farewell! thou beauteous sod,
Which Israel has for ages trod;
We leave thee to the oppressors' rod
        Weeping the exiles' doom.
We go! no more thy turf we press;
No more thy fruits and vineyards bless;
No land to love—no home possess,
        Save earth's cold breast—the tomb.

Where we have roamed the strangers roam;
The stranger claims each cherished home;
And we must ride on oceans foam,
        Accursed and ALONE.
False gods pollute our holy fame;
False hearts its sacred precincts stain;
False tongues our fathers' God profane;
        But WE are still HIS OWN.

Farewell! farewell! o'er land and sea,
Where e'er we roam, our soul shall be,
Land we have loved so long, with thee,

Tho' sad and lone we dwell
Thou land where happy childhood played;
Where youth in love's sweet fancies strayed;
Where long our fathers' bones have laid;
Our own bright land—Farewell!

35. Galchinsky, *Selected Writings*, 58.

CHAPTER FOUR
CRIPPLING PAST, LIBERATING FUTURE: ANGLO-JUDAISM AT HOME

> No such Israelitish pen has been consecrated to the service of religion for the ages. Her works will . . . live to enlighten generations to come.
>
> Miss Aguilar. . . . did more than any writer of modern times to sanctify her faith and every Jewish worshiper must hold her memory dear.
>
> —Rebecca Gratz, (1847)[1]

> The miracle of the continued existence of the Jews, the preservation of their identity in race and religion, amid all persecutions and dispersions, has prompted many a passage of modern eloquence; but Grace Aguilar has . . . equaled, if not excelled, any thing which has been written on the theme. . . . Grace Aguilar died young, but she has left the print of her mind on contemporary English literature, and we do not believe that it will be readily effaced.
>
> —*Graham's American Monthly*, (1851)[2]

Even though she was clearly a champion for Jews, Aguilar's appropriation of conversionist literary forms as well as her interaction with the Christian community has nevertheless garnered conflicting interpretations and criticism from twentieth and twenty-first century scholars. Beth Abraham-Lask and Linda Zatlin, for example, interpret Aguilar's involvement with evangelicals and Christians generally as resulting in "a form of Jewish Protestantism" or "Christianized Judaism"[3] that ultimately effected the purity of her Jewish devotion and thus her claims. In the more recent essay, "The Other Self: Anglo-Jewish Fiction and the Representation of Jews in England," Bryan Cheyette agrees with and invokes both Lask and Zatlin, without qualification, when he argues that "Aguilar developed a form of 'Jewish

Protestantism' or 'Christianized Judaism' and stressed the toleration of the Jews and Judaism not for its own sake but as an extension of Christian values" (98). I disagree. From very early in her career, Aguilar stressed toleration for Jews, as Jews, in English society. "Christian values"—particularly those associated with philo-Semitism—were very much a part of the cultural climate she was trying to reform. As I discuss at length, Aguilar wanted to strengthen the estimation of and respect for Jews *as Jews*: "if we once inculcate in the hearts of our youth the spirituality and the comfort of our holy religion, we shall have nothing whatever to fear in our close encounters with Christians. We shall find so much on which to agree, but we must *know* our own, or we are more than likely to become mentally entangled and confused" (*Jewish Faith* 35-36). Further, Cheyette's appropriation of Zatlin's word choice to describe Aguilar—Christianized Judaism or Christian Jew—is the very kind of phrasing on which conversionists themselves relied when peddling their message of persuasion and Christian love. For example, in his 1843 lecture given before the British Society for the Propagation of the Gospel Among the Jews, Reverend James C. Burns references the "Christian Jews, or Jewish Christians . . . who as a people are distinguished by their intellectual ability . . . and who only need therefore to have the 'veil lifted off, from their eyes in reading the Old Testament,' to become the ready-made accomplished expositors of the New."[4] Though the context is different, Cheyette's invocation of the same language as Burns, and others representing similar conversionist societies, to define Grace Aguilar's position in nineteenth century

England undermines her in much the same way Franklin and Leeser had done over a century before—perhaps even more so. At the very least, it reinforces the argument that Grace Aguilar is an assimilationist and negates her expressed desire for a Jewish home. After reading her response to Franklin and Leeser's claims that the *Records of Israel*—and by implication Aguilar herself—was "anti-Jewish," I can only wonder how she might have reacted to Cheyette's deeming her a "Christianized Jew." Though the terms are not synonymous, they both question Aguilar's Jewish devotion.

Cynthia Scheinberg, however, argues that "Aguilar fervently believed that only through active 'defensive' engagement with Christian culture could Jews and Judaism advance in Diaspora life. . . . If she sought strategies that could speak conclusively and inclusively to Christian readers, it was always part of a project of advancing Judaism and the Jewish people, a rhetorical strategy . . . rather than ideological commitment to Christian/Protestant doctrine" (154). Scheinberg's analysis of Aguilar's position in nineteenth century England works because it recognizes the complicated and somewhat radical nature of what Aguilar tried to accomplish in a social climate that was opposed to Jewish inclusion of any kind. Cheyette's view of her as an author who internalized the surrounding social values to produce "an ambivalent Jewish identity" that reinforced Jews' needing "to meet the expectations of the gentiles" ("Apology" 254) suggests a critical stance that does not consider the breadth of Aguilar's position in its interpretation. Thus, the suggestion

that because she was "raised among non-Jews," attended church services on occasion, and interacted with missionaries and evangelicals "Aguilar's Judaism is a Christianized version" (Zatlin 39) not only misreads what she was trying to accomplish, but discounts her position as a Jewish woman writer and reformer who took on the very difficult task of carving out a place for English Jews. Many labels can be attributed to Aguilar's fiction and her position on behalf of Jews and Judaism—everything from "fascinating," "inspiring" and "clever," to "didactic," "idealistic," and "priggish"[5]—but "ambivalent" and "Christian" do not effectively or even correctly describe Grace Aguilar and what she was trying to accomplish. Aguilar's expressed desire for Jewish integration did not promote an "ambivalent Jewish identity." As I have argued, Aguilar was not "ambivalent" about her own identity and expressly feared her fellow Jews becoming so themselves. Her position on behalf of Jews does not seek to "justify" or to "excuse"; on the contrary her reflections in both her fiction and non-fiction writings teach us the very opposite.

A "Jewish Protestant" in Their Midst?

> [Grace Aguilar] is entitled to the homage of Israelites for the great good she has done for the . . . efforts she is making to spiritualize their minds and hearts in the cause most important to individuals as well as to communities.
>
> —Rebecca Gratz (1847)[6]

Aguilar's lesser known collection of private essays and prayers, *Essays and Miscellanies, Choice Cullings From the Manuscripts of Grace Aguilar* not only supports my contention and Scheinberg's analysis, but also provides much in the way of her own defense against certain critical judgements. Aguilar had long been established

and lauded as an author by the time her mother, with great trepidation, released the journals and prayer books collectively titled *Essays* in 1853. Though it was the last "new work" published posthumously, Aguilar began writing much of what is collected here in the mid-1830s when the Evangelical movement was strong and Aguilar was just eighteen years old.[7] However, as Aguilar explains in an 1844 letter to Miriam Cohen, she never intended for others to read these most private reflections; they were "for [her] own use" and that she had even written them was "scarcely known beyond the hallowed Circle of [her] own dear Family" ("Correspondence" 98). Cohen's initial inquiry was made on behalf of her aunt, Rebecca Gratz, who on multiple occasions expressed her "wish" that Aguilar would publish "a vol[ume] of domestic worship . . . devotional exercises for every day of the week."[8] In 1845 Aguilar again responds to another request, this time from both Miriam and her husband Solomon: "My own M.S. prayers are so <u>essentially</u> for private use and adapted but to <u>my own</u> wants that I could not lend them out. . . . Pray, do not think me unkind for refusing. . . . They do but breathe thoughts—associations feelings which none but my God should know" (104). There has been no critical exploration of *Essays* itself; and it functions as an integral piece of Aguilar's larger vision for a Jewish home. I say integral because the entries reveal the way that Aguilar might have responded to Cheyette, Zatlin, and Lask—as well as her contemporaries like Leeser and Franklin. All of these critics question Aguilar's commitment to Jews and Judaism when they label her a "Jewish

Protestant" practicing a "Christianized Judaism" because she interacted with Christians and engaged in evangelical literary forms. Though these reflections and prayers may have been reserved for "private use," we fortunately have most of them in publication[9] and they, in conjunction with her fictional narratives, shed light on Aguilar's complexity and her vision for the future of British Jewry.

An early entry in the journal, November 9, 1836, reinforces Aguilar's claim that interaction between Jews and Christians is necessary to raise the estimation of Jews in Christian minds as well as to prepare Jews to defend themselves against conversionist attempts:

> God sees the hearts of all men. . . . He knows in what belief, what forms my prayers ascend to Him. . . . I conceive it no sin to worship with [Christians], nor can I see aught in their belief to call contempt from me. Besides, it is no credit to be firm and steadfast in your own belief if you are ignorant of that of others; and I seldom leave a Protestant church without . . . being yet more firmly convinced in the truth of my own religion. This may appear a contradiction, nevertheless it is true. I cannot esteem my friends for following upon their faith, unless I know what they are taught, and, when I do know that, and see how exactly they obey the dictates of their law, I must esteem them, however mistaken that law may appear to me; but I am more convinced in my own belief, because all that the Christian preaches, of portions of the Old Testament being typical of the sufferings of Christ, is to me clearly illustrative of the sufferings of my own loved nation. (20-21)

Although motivated by her devotion to Judaism, Aguilar's willingness to worship in a Christian church was, and is, unacceptable under traditional Orthodox practices. But as Galchinksy notes, Aguilar "is by no means orthodox" (*Origins* 152). Galchinsky, in fact, argues that Aguilar was "perhaps [the Anglo-Jewish community's] most formidable spokesperson for the religious reform and political

emancipation movements" (*Selected Writings* 47) in England. Nevertheless, the paradoxical imagery here—the Jewish woman who has spent much of her life devoted to rekindling the spirit of Judaism and Jewish life, sitting in the Christian (and conversionists') religious "home"—reinforces the dual, yet unifying, nature of her project, as does her determination to avert what David Ruderman defines as the conversionist "translation of Jewish belief into Protestant terms, with respect to both forms of worship and more personal expressions of religious faith" (10).

However, we must not confuse the radical nature of Aguilar's actions with a Christianized or Protestant Judaism. Rather, this 1836 entry in the journal is only one of many instances in which Aguilar solidifies her devotion to Jewish faith as well as her position on behalf of Anglo-Judaism. An interesting transition in tone and fervor transpires in the paragraphs that follow when Aguilar begins to recount one particular Christian service she had attended at which "Mr. Anderson" preached that the "twenty-second Psalm" was as "equally descriptive of the sufferings of Christ as the 53rd chapter of Isaiah" (21).[10] There is a shift from the voice that she insists should always remain "feminine"—the tone she consistently uses throughout her fictional narratives (influence without interfering)—to a voice Grace Aguilar very rarely shares with her reading public. For perhaps the first time, Aguilar does not censor her words; her voice is edgy, raw, and occasionally resonates with anger and frustration as she works through her own understanding of the lecture and reflects on "Mr. Anderson's" privileging of Christ's suffering over Jewish suffering. The

passage also reveals that Aguilar, even as she publicly calls for openness and freedom for Jews in England, carefully guards her most emotionally charged sentiments regarding Jewish suffering and persecution through the ages—the irony of course being that the journal entries were eventually published:

> Have we not indeed been hunted from the sun of the morning to the setting of the same, like hinds from their coverts hunted until we were pulled down by the evening wolves? Are we not as 'worms,' or at least have we not been in our years of persecution? have we not been looked upon more as worms than men? have we not been, are we not yet, in many nations, a 'reproach of men, and despised of people?'[11] and we have indeed been laughed to scorn, and people have shooted out the lip at us. And bid us, as they tortured us, call aloud upon our God for help. How frequently in the hour of torture have merciless persecutors told us with mocking gibes, 'now call on the God of Abraham, and see if He can deliver you!'. . . . The nations were to persecute us, they gaped for cruelty, they were ravening and roaring for victims, and they were ever supplied by the miserable Jews . . . . they did not assault us, as a lion would fall upon his prey, but they gaped for our destruction, even as we gape for sleep.[12] The very 'dogs' . . . have been set upon us by their masters; 'they have encompassed us;' the assembly of the wicked have enclosed us;[13] our hands and feet have been 'pierced' with wounds . . . the mode of punishment inflicted on Christ . . . cannot appear as anything to me, but as figurative of the tortures inflicted on us; by the barbarous nations amongst whom we have been scattered, when indeed our hands and feet were pierced, for we were tortured, to give up our faith. . . . And how clearly is the rapacity of the nations typified in the 18th verse, 'they part my garments among them, they cast lots for my vesture!'[14] Did not those who tormented the Jews for their treasurers, part the booty amongst them? They would cast lots even for their very garments, tempted by their riches. . . . Again: 'Deliver my soul from the sword; my darling from the power of the dog.'[15] What does this mean when applied to Christ? to me, it signifies, deliver *me* from death, my darling, or my child, from the dogs; for, how frequently, in the sacking of their cities, have Jewish infants been dashed from their mother's arms, and thrown as carrion to the dogs! 'Save me from the lion's mouth; thou hast heard me from the horns of the unicorns.'[16] That to me is illustrative of the wretched Jew, calling aloud to his God for help in the hour of greatest need.
>
> . . . Had I never heard Mr. Anderson preach on this beautiful psalm, I might have read and read again, and never thought it prophetic; but hearing how he

> took it to support his faith, it led me to examine and think, for somewhat wherewith to defend my belief. Even while he spoke, my mind at once conceived what he believed applicable to Christ, might with equal force apply to the Jewish nation. (21-23, 30).

Aguilar's comments on this particular sermon are significant because her own Judaism is reinforced by her frustration with Christian appropriation of the Psalm. In her reaction against Anderson's lecture, Aguilar is able to define what the text means for both herself and for Jews more generally. Thus, Aguilar's attending the Christian service doe not "Christianize" her, but rather reaffirms and strengthens her devotion to and understanding of Judaism. Furthermore, as Robert Smith explains in his essay "London Jews' Society and Patterns of Jewish Conversion in England, 1801-1859," conversionist societies supported the "truth" of Christianity (and thus conversion) with "the alleged fulfillment of the prophecies of the Old Testament in the New"; the passages most commonly used, notes Smith, were Isaiah 53 and Psalm 22 (284).[17]

A convening of the ministers of the established Church of Glasgow in 1838, for example, dedicated much of their discussion to the imperative of conversion and the necessity of removing "Jewish ignorance" regarding the Hebrew Bible by educating Jews on the "true meaning" of the sacred scriptures. One speaker argues: "In the Old Testament Scriptures there are so many clear and explicit testimonies to the truth of Christ's Messiahship . . . [that Jews'] continued infidelity, in the face of such overwhelming evidences to the truth of Christ, in their own books and history, is one of the most extraordinary things of a religious nature to be found in the past

history and present condition of the world."[18] And further, the "testimony of the Scripture . . . assures us that the conversion of this stiff necked people is a thing decreed and certain."[19] Both Mr. Anderson's 1836 sermon and the 1838 Glasgow meeting reveal how many church leaders and missionaries infused Old Testament texts with Christian meaning in their attempt to convert. Though they believed in what they preached, this method, explains Smith, also resulted from missionaries and evangelicals understanding that their argument for conversion must "at least appear to be rationally derived" (284) in order to be persuasive. As is evident in the above passage, the intensity with which Aguilar privately responds to claims like these, even at this early date in her career, reinforces the stance she takes publicly on behalf of Jews and Judaism later.

Scheinberg's discussion of Aguilar's interaction with the Christian world and her further recontextualization of Christian worship is particularly illuminating here. She explains that by going to these services, Aguilar internalizes and further "reverses" this standard Christian typological process "through which New Testament authors invest Jewish texts and ritual with specifically Christian meaning. Aguilar's creation of Jewish meaning from a Christian service can be understood . . . in part, as a specifically Jewish response to centuries of Christian interpretations of Judaism that produced specifically Christian prophetic meaning" (184). Although modern critics find Aguilar's novels religiously misleading or ambiguous, her candid discussions in *Essays* certainly do well to affirm her resolve on behalf of Jews and

Judaism. Further, Aguilar's ability to stand alone as a Jewish woman in a Christian service and remain secure in her faith reinforces her own commitment to Judaism even as it conjures the image of her crypto-Jewish ancestry: Jews who, under threat of persecution, held firm in or reclaimed their beliefs in dire and extenuating circumstances. This devotion to her specific Jewish heritage is perhaps most vividly captured in Aguilar's 1844 poem "A Vision of Jerusalem." Aguilar recounts her experience, standing "alone" as a Jew among Christians, listening to "the beautiful organ" in the "gentile shrine":

> My country! oh my country! was my soul enrapt in thee
> One passing moment, that mine eyes might all thy glory see?
> What magic power upheld me there?—alas! alas! it past,
> And darkness o'er my aspiring soul the heavy present cast.
>
> I stood ALONE 'mid thronging crowds who fill'd that stranger shrine,
> For there were none who kept that faith I hold so dearly mine:
> And exile felt I, in that house, from Israel's native sod,—
> An exile yearning for my *home*,—yet loved still by my God.
>
> No exile from His love! No, no; though captive I may be,
> And I must weep whene'er I think, my fatherland, on thee!
> Jerusalem! my beautiful! my own! I feel thee still. . . .
>
> . . . . Oh that my parayers could raise thee radiant from the sod,
> And turn from Judah's exiled sons their God's avenging rod! . . . (17-27, 43-44)

Scheinberg explains that the "gentile shrine" represents "the larger dominant Christian culture of Victorian England. . . . Within the explicit Christian setting, and all of its sounds and sights, Aguilar's Jewish speaker demonstrates the power of her Jewish commitment by imaginatively transposing aspects of Christian worship into

the powerful images of specifically Jewish redemption" (184). For example, as Aguilar hears the "thousand voices chaunted, His glory to upraise, / More heavenly and thrillingly then e'en David's days" (7-8), she thinks of "the sons of Levi . . . in holy garments there, / . . . . And thousands of my people throng'd the pure and holy fane, / the curse removed from every brow, ne'er more to some again. . . " (9, 10-11). Although Aguilar may be in the Christian house of worship, she is nevertheless able to feel "at home" in a sense because she can freely access her faith, and her God, even here. Though physically displaced from Jerusalem, though an "exile" from that "home," the speaker is not exiled from "His love! No, no." Thus, her internal strength, fueled by her commitment to her God, empowers her to persevere not unlike Marie Morales. The speaker's faith is no longer a secret, but she relies on her own powers of internalization, of adaptation without sacrifice of belief, to stand in a Christian church and worship as a Jew. Aguilar's additional comments regarding this kind of worship in *Essays* further supports the poem's imagery:

> God, He has in His mercy permitted me to be so firmly convinced of the truth and holiness of my own belief, that it *is* a pleasure to me to join with Christians in their religious forms. If we *look* for it, we shall find in almost, nay, in every lecture whose foundation is religion, somewhat that comes home to our own hearts, somewhat that will strike the inmost recesses of the soul, even though it be addressed to the followers of Christ . . . even then may the mind of a liberal and pious Jew be enlarged. (19)

While Aguilar need not keep her faith secret, nor does she ever advocate doing so, she implicitly calls on the strength of her Jewish heritage as a guiding support for her position and, by extension, for Jews generally. What "A Vision of Jerusalem"

demonstrates, explains Scheinberg, "is not only the speaker's own powerful maintenance of Jewish self . . . while surrounded by Christianity. . . . [but] an unconverted Jew sitting among the Christian throng, a Jew who is not affected by the fact that Christian culture generally casts Jews as 'Judah's ingrate race'" (187).

Aguilar's Christian contemporaries were themselves quite clear where her religious devotion resided; they praised and criticized her for reinforcing the importance of Jewish faith as well as for steadfastly promoting full integration: "Miss Aguilar is an uncompromising Jewess," one reviewer comments; "and, we are bound to say, that a more lofty tone of spirituality never greeted us than that in which this Jewish lady unfolds her own faith. . . . The object of her work is to raise . . . the tone of religion amongst her own brethren."[20] Aguilar "seems calculated to do good. [She] will enlarge our knowledge of the true faith and practice of the Jews, and increase our esteem and affection for them as children of our common parents," notes another Christian writer.[21] Those who praised Grace Aguilar, however, were not the only ones to support her position as a Jewish woman and activist. Reviewers convinced that Aguilar's novels and writings were "decidedly dangerous" because they were "in reality an argument for Judaism" become perhaps her strongest, though unwitting, supporters against modern critical labels of "Christianized Judiasm":

> Miss Aguilar's work is not for the grave doctors, learned rabbis and fair 'mothers' of her own 'Israel.' Her volumes hitherto have found their way to numberless Christian homes and firesides. . . . Under the impression that they are gathering at once religious information and entertainment, young

> girls will read that Miss Aguilar 'rejects wholly and utterly all belief in the "Nazarene doctrine". . . . We submit with all respect that neither the doctrines nor the writing, of this race are the proper inmates of Christian homes.[22]

As well read fictions laying the groundwork for Jewish integration, Aguilar's novels "found their way [in]to numberless Christian homes and firesides." At the same time, Aguilar's conviction that interaction with "the Stranger" could "exalt or lower" the estimation of the Jews was reaffirmed by another Christian reviewer for *Godey's Lady's Book* who posted a "Literary Notice" just after *Essay's* release in 1853: "Grace Aguilar was herself one of the gifted daughters of Israel, and hence we are not surprised to find her enthusiastic in the defence of the ancient faith of the chosen people of God. There are many things in her writings which, though they may not convince us of the truth of that which she advocates, will at least warm our Christian charities toward her people."[23] Similarly, an 1851 reviewer notes that the "intensity of [Aguilar's] Jewish faith will give a shock to many a Christian reader."[24] Though she may not have wanted to share her private journals with the public, in conjunction with Aguilar's other published works and reviews, *Essays* counter claims of "Jewish Protestantism" and reinforce her deep and emotionally charged position.

Additionally, a relatively unknown early-nineteenth century writer, William Hone, indirectly supports the interpretation of Aguilar as a committed Jew. Hone acknowledges that the contemporary predicament of the Jews had resulted from the "dreadful perversion of scripture . . . triumph[ing] over truth and mercy" in Christian countries through the ages. Like Aguilar, Hone maintained that though

the philo-Semitic practices of conversionist societies was less overtly threatening than the past anti-Judaism of England or Spain, it was just as dangerous:

> The enlightenment of this age has dispelled much of the darkness of the last. Yet the errors of public opinion then respecting the Jews, remain to be rectified now by the solemn expression of a better public opinion. Formerly, if one of the 'ancient people' had said in the imploring language of the slave, 'Am I not a *man*, and a brother?' he might have been answered, 'No, you are not a *man*, but a *Jew*.' It is not the business of the Jews to petition for justice, but it is the duty of the Christians to be just.[25]

Hone recognizes that even though the English do not commit violent acts against Jews like the Spanish had done two centuries before, anti-Jewish sentiment and "opinions" about "the Jews, remain to be rectified." Conjuring Shylock's "Hath not a Jew eyes" speech in *The Merchant of Venice*, Hone reinforces the point that the Jews in England are still considered inhuman, "not a *man*, but a *Jew*." As Felsenstein explains, writers of a "liberal bias" like Hone, tended "to acknowledge that the far greatest responsibility for the predicament of the Jews lie[d] in their vile treatment through the ages in Christian countries" (254). Christian attitudes toward Jews must change, argues Hone; however, Aguilar does not wait for "Christians to be just." She not only makes it her business "to petition for justice" on behalf of Jews and Judaism, but she holds conversionists accountable for their "dreadful perversions of scripture," for their willingness to exercise whatever narrative means necessary to secure Jews' conversion, especially when that meant distorting truth and manipulating readers' sympathies with an artificial and artful brand of "mercy." As Scheinberg rightly explains, Aguilar "responds to and challenges the Christian

approaches to Jewishness as [she] sought to claim [her] Jewish voice [ ] within the English literary tradition" (61). And, I would add, Anglo-Judaism's place in the English nation.

In her attempt to plot significant change for both Anglo-Jewry and nineteenth century England, Aguilar insists that though "scattered among the nations as witnesses of the PAST," Jews are "pledges of the FUTURE, and shall we with indifference permit others to claim the privileges which are ours. . . . No, O no! Surely, individually and nationally, we shall use our every effort to proclaim our high and glorious descent amid the nations!" (95). Aguilar's "every effort" does not include "meet[ing] the expectations of gentiles"; for she "made no accommodation with the [Christian] world."[26] "A new era is dawning for us" she writes in the *Women of Israel* (5); "a spirit of inquiry, of patriotism, of earnestness . . . in lieu of the stagnating darkness, the appalling indifference, which had reigned so long. . . . Israel is springing up once more the stronger, nobler, more spiritually enlightened, from the long and waveless sleep" (6). These words do not sound like the words of one who was content to acquiesce to anyone's standards.

Michael Galchinsky's suggestion that Aguilar is an "enlightener" better defines, I think, her position in early Victorian England. Galchinsky views Aguilar within the context of the Jewish Enlightenment (*Haskalah*) that began in the eighteenth century in Germany and the "English variant" beginning in the 1820s (*Selected Writings* 14).[27] Central to Aguilar's position was engaging in, recording,

and "bringing about the complex encounter between Jews and modernity, an encounter that involved European Jews' transition from resident alien to citizens, as well as the internal reform of their organizational structures, theology, and observances" (14-15). Aguilar's "most important work as an 'enlightener'" was her effort against conversionists who targeted Jewish women "as the weak link among the Jews" in their tales (15). Aguilar may have used conversionist forms, but she contributed "texts that were different from those written by majority writers" (17) and implicitly forced readers to ask: "What is Englishness? And what are its borders?" Further, Galchinsky notes that though Aguilar seemingly acquiesces "to the borders set for her by others, she often transgressed them" (17). Her work has a kind of "double-consciousness" because it is "simultaneously assimilationist and resistant" (17). While I have disagreed with the interpretation that Aguilar is assimilationist, I nevertheless agree that Aguilar was constantly balancing her desire for full Jewish integration with British society's desire to assimilate and convert Jews. This balancing inherently meant "resisting" the British status quo and its definition of religious unity—which meant the exclusion of Jews—even though Aguilar often used conversionist forms and relied on the Christian sense of hegemonic security in her works to affect change. Elizabeth Fay similarly defines Aguilar as a "bridge writer," an author whose works not only bridged the gap between the Romantic and Victorian periods, but also "a more significant gap" between the Anglo and Jewish communities (216). She was "progressive," argues Fay, because "she understood

that Jewish emancipation necessitated both reform within the community and the development of a culture of exchange between Anglicans and Jews. Aguilar saw that rigid community borders not only blinded those within to the need for reform . . . but that impermeable boundaries between the dominant culture and the Jewish community meant continuing the possibility for persecution and expulsion" (216).

We see Aguilar's "progressiveness" take shape when she calls on her "adopted country" to aid in both the dissolution of Christian prejudices as well as the lingering prejudices within the Jewish community itself:

> Fifty years ago, the Sephardim congregation was considered so superior to the Ashkenazim, as to be universally acknowledged as the aristocracy of the nation; but this supposition had nothing to do with Israelitish notions. It was, in fact, contrary to the spirit of the Jewish law . . . which . . . looked on all Jews as equal. . . . The modern distinction simply arose from the fact, that in Spain and Portugal the Jews had held the highest stations. . . . even after their expulsion, they existed apparently as Christians, but in reality most faithful Jews, amongst the . . . nobles . . . or as merchants and doctors. . . . Germany has indeed ennobled a Jew. . . . But *contemporary* with the Jewish aristocracy of Spain and Portugal, the Jews in Germany were so oppressed and enslaved, as never to rise above those confining and debasing employments which must ever be the consequences of persecution; and therefore when the two parties met on equal ground, the free and blessed soil of England, the haughty pride of the *Spaniard* (not of the *Jew* . . .) caused that exclusiveness even from his German brother . . . which happily is now fading rapidly into the past. (*Women of Israel* 555-556)

Writing to Jews and Christians at the same time, Aguilar calls for the dissolution of prejudices—both the thriving prejudices Christians harbor against Jews, and the still lingering prejudices within the Sephardic and Ashkenazic Jewish communities. Even though the wealthier Sephardim gained somewhat greater social standing, they were nevertheless still targets for conversion. However, the Ashkenazi Jews immigrating

into England suffered persecution not only from Christians, but also from Sephardic Jews because they were poor and tended to be less formidable members of the community.[28] Thus, Aguilar's direct addresses to her co-religionists—both Sephardim and Ashkenazim—regarding the necessity of unity in Judaism rather than division based on differences in historical, cultural, financial, or national backgrounds is essential. Aguilar holds her contemporaries accountable for any internal prejudices they harbor (particularly those of her own Sephardic community), but she also reinforces that these prejudices are the result of differences in cultural experiences, "these are the effects of our dispersion; of sixteen or seventeen centuries of assimilation . . . [in Germany and Spain] . . . that we forget the national unity which our holy religion so imperatively demands and which will be gradually attained; but it requires time" (556). However, Aguilar never suggests that Jews strip themselves of their culture or their ancestral heritage, "That there is still a difference in the characteristics of German and Portuguese, we allow . . . but the difference and the prejudice are alike foreign to *Judaism*" (556). Though spiritual identity takes precedence over cultural and ancestral distinctions for Aguilar, those distinctions must not be, and should not be, ignored. Instead they play a secondary role to the "national unity which [the] holy religion so imperatively demands" so the Jewish community can flourish in its entirety. Whether from Spain, Portugal, Germany, or elsewhere, Jews must present a unified front as English Jews: "till we are really English Jews, the distinction which has existed so many centuries will never be

entirely lost. . . . Is not a Hebrew a Hebrew in the sight of God and man—and why then should we not be brothers? Why will not the German imitate the Spaniard in some things, and the Spaniard the German in others, and so forget the idle distinctions of our captivity, and only strive to become Hebrews as our Bibles teach, and Englishmen, as a love for our adopted country would dictate" (559). Somewhat ironically Aguilar sees England, the country that ostracized and outright rejected them, as a nation that can unify Ashkenazic and Sephardic Jews.

Thus, Aguilar cleverly laces this appeal for Jewish unity with the secondary argument against Christian prejudices. At the same time that she implores Jews to band together, Aguilar establishes an important connection between herself (and by extension, Jews generally) and the Christian opinions she tries to sway by raising the "free and blessed soil of England" (and thus the English) high above the "haughty pride of the *Spaniards*" (and thus Spain). Aguilar appeals to her Christian readers' national pride and ego by arguing that Spain and Germany's oppressive climates fostered internal prejudices between Jews, resulting in the Sephardic and Ashkenazic cultures "forgetting" that "a Hebrew is a Hebrew in the sight of God and man." She reinforces the idea that "England offers a rest and home of perfect freedom to the exile and oppressed" (556). England can aid in Jews forgetting "the idle distinctions of . . . captivity"—this was something, as the English continually stressed, neither Spain nor Germany were willing to do. By welcoming "all," England affords Jews the opportunity to remedy the "mistaken distinction which only circumstances

wrought" between the Sephardim and Ashkenazim. And as she also attempts in *The Vale of Cedars*, Aguilar preemptively counters, if not outright rejects, the racial argument against Jews that will gain popularity later in the nineteenth century.[29] Instead, Aguilar defends her "Hebrew nation" by indirectly suggesting that it is not "the Jew" as "racial other" that the English really despise, but rather their Spanish and German characteristics. Galchinsky explains that because she "constructs a very different kind of literary history than her Christian contemporaries do. . . . Aguilar uses the idea of the *nation* to express the needs of a *diaspora*" (*Selected Writings* 13). While the British themselves strove for a nation unified by Christianity, their opposition to all "others" in the name of that very unity, was instead divisive. Nevertheless, Aguilar locates English nationhood as separate from religious identity and as the single cultural element that can draw both Christians and Jews, as well as the diverse communities within both, together. In her estimation there can and should be English Christians and English Jews. Aguilar's argument suggests that through the integration and acceptance of religious difference England as a nation can become unified. In other words, by providing a home for Jews of various backgrounds, England can realize the unity it claims it desires rather than the contentious and divisive nature of philo-Semitism and conversion. At the same time, Jews themselves can unite under English nationhood even while recognizing their cultural ancestry and religious diversity.

By interacting with Christians in this way and by "writing texts that were similar to those of her English contemporaries and yet different, Aguilar could simultaneously make her work appeal to a broader national audience while articulating her particular vision as a Jewish woman" (13) and protecting against Jewish conversion. However, Aguilar makes clear for both Jews and Christians that dissolving prejudice "requires time" and a "willingness" on the part of the English to aid in remedying "fifteen centuries" of either forced assimilation, dispersion, or exile—Jews need *English* help, she effectively argues. Is England willing? Can England do what Spain and Germany could not? Aguilar asks between the lines. Does her "adopted nation" have the sympathetic resources and the ability to put prejudice aside and unite an otherwise culturally divided Jewish people by embracing them under the banner of England? Aguilar both challenges and bolsters English pride by appealing to readers in this way. She uses an interesting tactic, particularly in light of the British history of centuries of prejudice and attempted conversions that reinforce an interpretation of a nation that would much rather weaken Jewish ties than strengthen them. Also, by clearly defining England as superior—exactly what conversionists themselves were doing in their stories and revisionist histories—Aguilar capitalizes on a mindset that used the inhumanity of medieval Spanish history to convince Jews that England was "the heaven of the Jews" (Ragussis 129). As her stories suggest, and as her letters, journals and non-fiction prose support, Aguilar does see England as that potential heaven; however, it is a

home that still needs a great deal of work. Aguilar will not sacrifice the identity of the Jewish people to fulfill her desire for integration; Jews must "strive to become Hebrews . . . and Englishmen." Though she may gamble with Jews' already unstable position by appealing to, if not infiltrating, British society in this way, it is a clever roll of the dice.

Veiling her argument for the elimination of prejudice—between and among Christians and Jews—with an indirect attack on the inhumanity of other nations and cultures (explicitly Spain, an attack the English themselves were heading) Aguilar reveals her keen awareness of her readers and her knowledge that a cogent presentation of facts would do little on their own to alter the deeply ingrained philo-Semitic ethos of early-nineteenth century England. Aguilar's interaction with the evangelical and missionary communities became an indispensable literary device in her battle against conversionist pressures. Felsenstein explains that the conversionist genre "is almost unique in being addressed directly to or indirectly at the Jews themselves. Its avowed aim being to persuade, it often tacitly assumes a dual readership of believing Christians requiring affirmation of their faith and nonbelieving Jews who remain to be convinced" (91). Flipping the genre on its head and further translating conversionist methodologies as she does—reaffirming Jewish faith while trying to convince Christians they need not convert Jews—Aguilar can, with relative ease and safety, reach back to a constructed Jewish past to support

her push toward integration and a stable Jewish home in England in the present and for the future.

Aguilar's criticism of England's interactions with Jews becomes much more overt in her essay "History of the Jews in England." In early 1845, Colburn & Co.,[30] a prominent Victorian publishing house, urged her to write a history of Jewish persecution in England, offering her a liberal sum to do so. She declined: "We are so well treated in England now, that it would be most ungrateful to revive the memory of those half-forgotten wrongs."[31] While Aguilar would not write a history of Jewish persecution, she would eventually write a "History of the Jews in England" in that same year. It was published by *Chambers' Miscellany* in 1847. Aguilar's letter to Robert Chambers reinforces the importance she associated with the essay finding a public venue:

> My dear Sir,
>
> . . . I have not yet received your promised communication, concerning my little article the "History of the Jews in England" which you led me to hope might prove suitable to your useful publication . . . .
>
> Anxious as I naturally am on the subject. . . . It would gratify me much to hear from you . . . .[32]

As Galchinsky suggests, the essay "should be seen as the founding text of Anglo-Jewish historiography. . . . [T]he history is fascinating in its scope as well as for its atypically critical tone towards British Protestants" (*Selected Writings* 213). Additionally, Aguilar's refusal to write Colburn's history of English *prejudice* but willingness to write *a* history speaks to a number of important issues regarding her narrative choices and her position as a Jewish woman writer. As I have discussed,

Aguilar carefully balanced her objectives for Jews and Judaism within the context of creating sympathy in her Christian readers, as well as within her desire to ameliorate the feelings of ostracism and homelessness Jews combated in their struggles with conversionists.

In her "History" Aguilar explains:

> The Hebrew nation, as is well known, has been for ages scattered over the face of the earth, and now exists in different portions in every civilsed country; retaining, however, in all situations, the religion, manners, and recollections of its ancestry—almost everywhere less or more oppressed, yet everywhere possessing the same unconquerable buoyancy of spirit and the same indomitable industry. It would be a very long and dismal story to tell of the settlement and suffering of the Jews in the various countries of Europe, and we propose, therefore, to confine ourselves to a brief narration principally concerning their residence and treatment in Great Britain. (1)

Though more objective at first, Aguilar concludes with an appeal to British sympathy:

> Such is the history of a people who, though . . . subjects of this free and happy land, are yet regarded as aliens and strangers; and still . . .objects of rooted prejudice and dislike. . . . [T]he British empire has given the exiles of Judea a home of peace and freedom . . . they feel towards her affection and reverence as strong and undying as any of her native sons, [and] it is to be hoped that the prejudice against the Jews will ultimately disappear with the dawn of an era in which all Englishmen, however differently they may pray to the Great Father of all, shall yet, so long as they fail not in duty to their country and to each other, be regarded as the common children of one soil. (32)

As Lask notes, Aguilar's "History" was written "with an eye to its effect on the non-Jewish reader. . . . For many non-Jewish readers in England, this study . . . provided the first unprejudiced account of Jewish history, appearing in an English publication with a very wide circulation" (145). That is, Aguilar's "History" was the first of its

kind written by a non-Christian and without a conversionist bias. The essay does, however, call attention to the religious persecution of the time: "By the multitudes, the Jews are still considered aliens and foreigners; supposed to be separated by an antiquated creed and peculiar customs from sympathy and fellowship—little known and still less understood. Yet they are, in fact, Jews only in their religion—Englishmen in everything else. In point of fact, therefore, the disabilities under which the Jews of Great Britain labour are the last relic of religious intolerance," (16) Aguilar argues. Even though she insists that Jews were "Jews only in their religion—Englishmen in everything else," their Judaism nevertheless made them Other—made them difficult (if not near impossible) candidates for sympathy. Well aware of this, Aguilar's "History" appeals to British pride in its valorization of England. Not unlike her novels, Aguilar skillfully places her discussion of Jewish persecution within the larger context of British hospitality in order to effect some level of sympathetic identification, and thus acceptance, for Jews as Jews. In so doing, Aguilar again takes her cues from philo-Semitic methodology. To borrow Galchinsky's example: Aguilar tries to lead the proverbial donkey forward with a carrot, rather than beat him with a stick.[33] By acknowledging British "hospitality" for giving "the exiles of Judea a home of peace and freedom" rather than berating her fellow English countrymen for their past and current prejudices, Aguilar can leave readers pondering Jews' love for England and their kindness toward an otherwise outcast people, while also expressing her hope that "prejudice against the Jews will

ultimately disappear." Although Aguilar's focus on England in her "History" directly criticizes at times, she still manages to boost English pride and English nationhood. Thus, in order to effect real change for Anglo-Jews, Aguilar consistently balanced her criticism and her praise in an attempt to improve the Christian estimation of Jews and the Jews' estimation of themselves, even when rejecting Christian prejudice outright. Aguilar thus occupies a space "sitting on the edges of things" and "writing in order to demonstrate the permeability of edges" (Fay 216). If *The Vale of Cedars* and "A History of the Jews in England" reveals the history of Jews' inability to penetrate the edges, *The Perez Family* demonstrates Aguilar's vision of what happens when the secret barriers come down, the edges become permeable, and Jews settle a home in England.

"Being Home"

> The British empire has given the exiles of Judea a home of peace and freedom, and . . . they feel towards her affection and reverence as strong and undying as any of her native sons, it is to be hoped that the prejudice against the Jews will ultimately disappear with the dawn of an era in which all Englishmen, however differently they may pray to the Great Father of all, shall yet, so long as they fail not in duty to their country and to each other, be regarded as the common children of one soil.
>
> —Grace Aguilar, "History of the Jews in England" (1846)

> May the Lord make the woman who is coming into your house like Rachel . . . who[ ] built up the House of Israel! . . . And may your house be like the house of Perez. . . .
>
> —Ruth, *Tanakh* 4:11

In *Uneven Developments*, Mary Poovey explains that "any challenge [to the status quo] is important because it is an intervention—an intervention that may well

disrupt processes already underway and that certainly will become part of the cultural contest by which new meanings are produced" (23). Aguilar's use of fictional characters to effect change, to unveil the stereotyped "Jew" of the past and free the Anglo-Jews of the present clearly challenges the early-nineteenth century Anglo-Christian establishment. The literature pervading the social discourse of the time reinforces the notion that nineteenth century England wanted little more to do with Jews than what was necessary to convert them. Nevertheless, Grace Aguilar reaches out to those very conversionists, as well as to those in English society who might have been concealing even the slightest sympathy for the Jewish plight but were afraid to reveal it. Challenging the unwarranted Christian fear of Jews, Aguilar "disrupts" conversionist "processes" and creates new meaning in her attempt to knock down the barriers keeping Jews from "being home" in England. Her use of fiction in this way is integral to both her call for reform and to our critical understanding of her rhetoric. As I have discussed, the significance of Aguilar's interaction with Christian forms goes beyond her occasional appropriation of their literary tactics. For Aguilar, the ability to establish an Anglo-Jewish home, and thus an Anglo-Jewish identity, is intimately tied to disrupting, and eventually dismantling, conversionist efforts.

But how could Jews begin to disrupt the process of conversion themselves? Aguilar suggests that much of their successful defense rested on how well Jews knew both their own religion and that of the "Strangers"; she insists that "to be kept in

ignorance of the Nazarine [sic] readings of the Bible does no good whatever. . . . Much better is it to know clearly the danger we are not unlikely to encounter, and how to avert it, than to come upon it wholly unprepared" (*Women of Israel* 218-219). Further, in addition to preparing Jews to fend off conversion, Aguilar sees interacting with Christians as a necessity for strengthening the Jewish community because Jews "have not only an *individual*, but a *national* character to support . . . a brief half hour's intercourse with a stranger is endowed with power to *exalt* or to *lower* the cause of Israel" (*Jewish Faith* 79). Aguilar's domestic novella *The Perez Family* exemplifies her position in this regard as it both "exalt[s] . . . the cause of Israel" and continues to challenge and disrupt, to use Poovey's words, nineteenth century England's vision of itself and its vision of "the Jew." Having recast Sephardic Jewish history with tales like the *Records of Israel* and *The Vale of Cedars*, Aguilar turns to domestic fiction to bring the Jewish Other in from the margins of society as she begins to widen that English "narrow circle called home" (Martin and Mohanty 298).

The Perez Family, Grace Aguilar's most extensive fictional depiction of what it is to be "at home" as a Jew in nineteenth century England, was written at the request of Charlotte Montefiore for the Cheap Jewish Library in 1842 and published in 1843. The novella, Michael Galchinsky explains, "was unlike any other fiction Aguilar had yet written. . . . [H]er innovation was to leave behind the historical romance and speak directly to her audience in what she conceived of as its own

language, its own environment, its own concerns" (180). However, though a decidedly domestic narrative whose nineteenth century Anglo-Jewish characters are draped in Victorian and Jewish idealism,[34] *The Perez Family* does not stray very far from Aguilar's earlier tales like the *Records of Israel* and *The Vale of Cedars*. While the conclusions of her historical fictions indicate a turn toward the domestic, Aguilar does not entirely leave the historical genre or its models behind—those who bid "farewell" to medieval Iberian persecution as they flee to England carry little more than their Sephardic crypto-Jewish history with them. *The Perez Family* not only embodies that history, but it further translates it from distant times and "wild" places to the present and seemingly more refined England. Furthermore, as Aguilar begins to define her vision of Anglo-Judaism she transforms her crypto-Jewish Marie Morales of the medieval Spanish past into her Rachel Perez and Sarah Levison of the nineteenth century English present. In *The Perez Family* Aguilar removes Marie's "double-veil" to realize for Rachel, Sarah, and contemporary Anglo-Jews what Marie could not as a secret Jew in inquisitorial Spain: the freedom to live proudly and confidently as a Jew beyond the Vale/veil. That is, to realize "being home," as Martin and Mohanty describe, and of being in "a place" where "one is free from attack."[35] At the same time that Aguilar constructs a narrative space where Jewish history can be honored and observed by the ancestors of those persecuted refugees, she also fashions a relevant fictional model for what she hoped British Jewry might become.

As I have argued, Aguilar promotes an Anglo-Judaism that frees Jews from behind their veil, from a life of secrecy and hiding, that fully allows for their integration with the larger Christian society, but reinforces keeping Jewish rituals and observances within the privacy of the home. She brings her reclaimed Sephardic Jewish history into the nineteenth century world with stories like *The Vale of Cedars* and the *Records of Israel*, but she also reinvents that heritage for her contemporaries—both Jews and Christians. What must survive from behind the secret veil is Marie Morales's commitment to and grounding in Jewish faith, that is, her ability to withstand conversion attempts whether they be the physical torture of Don Luis Garcia or Queen Isabella's more "loving" pleas:

> she could yet so clearly, so calmly . . . bring argument for argument, and never waver in her steadfast adherence to, and belief in her own creed. . . . The very lessons of her youth . . . returned with full—she fancied superhuman—force and clearness to her mind, rendering even the very wish to embrace the Catholic religion futile. There was a voice within her that *would* be heard, aye above every human feeling, every strong temptation. . . . to the exclusion of every distinct idea, that voice would breathe its thrilling whisper, telling her . . . she could not in heart be a Catholic; and so she dared not be in words. (222)

"The very lessons of youth," invoked when she was a child, establish the foundation in Jewish identity that, even as a crypto-Jew, enable Marie to persevere. Furthermore, Aguilar's own interactions with society reinforce the kind of Anglo-Jewish life she promoted in her writings. Though she was certainly a well known Jewish woman, Aguilar kept her own "religious habits" private. Anna Maria Hall recalls that Aguilar

> mingled the most intense faith and devotion to her own people, [but]. . . [w]ell as we knew her, we were quite unacquainted with her religious habits; though the odour of sanctity exhaled from all she did and said, she never assumed to be holier than others; never sought discussion; never, in her intercourse with Christians, though sometimes sorely pressed, gave utterance to a hard word or uncharitable feeling, even when roused to lead with eloquent lips and tearful eyes the cause of her beloved Israel. (454)

As her own actions support, Aguilar's vision involved rectifying not only conversionist exaggerations of Jewish history, but revitalizing Jewish spirit and home life as well. Hall's description of Aguilar's non-threatening and private nature reinforces this point and these are "the lessons" with which Aguilar's *The Perez Family* is most concerned.

Aguilar conjures crypto-Jewish history within the first lines of *The Perez Family*, thus speaking to the centrality with which that history plays a role in her larger vision for a nineteenth century Anglo-Jewish home. No longer in the "wilds of Spain," Aguilar brings readers to the "melancholy alleys in the environs of Liverpool" and into "a small cottage, possessing much in the interior in favour of its inhabitants; cleanliness and neatness were clearly visible, greatly in contradistinction to the neighboring dwellings" (1). Though the Perezes are settled in a physical home, vestiges of the Vale of Cedars do remain in the form of a flourishing little garden behind the house, "carefully and prettily laid out, and planted with the sweetest flowers" (1). "[C]ontriving an entrance" (11) by "making their sitting-room and kitchen open up into it . . . [the Perezes] scarcely. . . use[d] the front, except for ingress and egress" (11). The Jews that once "were not allowed to possess

a foot of land . . . [were torn] up by the roots and trample[d] on . . . like noxious weeds . . . [who could] not take root in the soil like wholesome plants"[36] now "found pleasure" in "the newly-turned earth" and "budding flowers" (11). Caren Kaplan explains that a garden "resonates with many cultural associations. . . . The parameters are fluid. . . . [it is] not a walled place. . . . Not secret—but private. A private open space. This is a new terrain, a new location. . . . mak[ing] a world of possibilities out of the experience of displacement" (367). Aguilar is indeed traversing a "new terrain" in her attempt to promote a private, not secret, existence for Jews in nineteenth century England. A "world of possibility," according to Kaplan, and a home for a diaspora that had suffered centuries of "displacement."

The Perez family's garden, small though it may be, is essential to Aguilar's notion of home as I have discussed it because it signifies Jews' newfound "rootedness" in both a private dwelling and a nation; Aguilar's contemporary England in this narrative is "the place" Jews can "live within familiar, safe, protected boundaries" (Martin and Mohanty 297). The garden exemplifies this idea because it maintains distance between the Perez family and their neighbors, "greatly to the disappointment and vexation of the gossips of the alley, nothing could be gleaned of the sayings and doings of its inmates" (1); the garden "prevented all gossiping intercourse, which their neighbours had done all they could to introduce" (11). Much like Marie's Vale, where "the hand of man had . . . aided nature in forming the wild yet chaste beauty of the scene" (*Vale* 16) to provide "a refuge and concealment

from the secret power of the Inquisition . . . [where] Nature herself appeared to have marked the spot as an impenetrable retreat" (33), the garden protects the Perezes from prying, malevolent eyes. The Vale aides Marie in keeping her "fatal secret"; while the Perezes, openly Jewish in nineteenth century England, maintain their garden to establish protected, though fluid, boundaries. Though the level of their threat is no longer of inquisitorial proportions, Aguilar implies a threat still remains for nineteenth century Anglo-Jews. Whereas Marie Morales and the crypto-Jews of the past were forced into hiding and secrecy, the Perezes set their own boundaries and control the dominant culture's interaction with those borders. This juxtaposition in imagery speaks to the way Aguilar envisioned Jewish existence. The Perez family never disguise or hide their faith, they are free to "egress and ingress," but their need for a garden veil reinforces the point that Jews, even in Aguilar's vision of home, are not entirely protected from the otherwise "censorious world."

In *The Perez Family* Aguilar presents readers with an otherwise unfamiliar contemporary Jewish world by constructing a narrative space that explores the "probable" and more familiar experiences of nineteenth century Jews in England. Unlike Marie Morales, Sarah struggles to find work and acceptance as a young Jewish woman in London. Rather than lead a secret Sukkot celebration in the mysterious and medieval Vale of Cedars, Rachel Perez leads the Sabbath service and provides biblical exegesis in the quiet privacy and safety of her home each Friday night. Infused with some of Marie's "superhuman" strength and romantic heroism

as she makes her way "through falling rafters and blazing walls" to save her daughter from a fire, Rachel Perez is meant to illustrate a strong Jewish woman. Her power resides in her chosen commitment to her family and to her religious obligations, particularly after she loses her husband to illness. Further, as the embodiment of Sephardic Jewish history, Rachel is a transitional figure, a bridge (much like Aguilar herself) connecting Marie Morales's secret and persecuted past to the freer, integrated Anglo-Jewish future.

Aguilar's comments on the importance of women to Judaism appear in Rachel's ability to educate her children in the spirit of and necessary commitment to their faith. Though *The Vale of Cedars* reveals much in the way of Sephardic Jewish history, *The Perez Family* is Aguilar's first fictional account of real Jewish practices in nineteenth century England. Thus, Rachel's "lesson" serves both her children and Aguilar's readers. With the ritual lighting of the candles and the evening prayers (see Figure 3), Rachel "opens the large Bible. . . . every heart united in reverence and love towards this weekly service—in, if possible, increased devotion towards that beloved parent, who so faithfully endeavoured to support not alone her duties toward her offspring, but those of their departed father" (28). Aguilar balances Rachel's concern with the domestic matters of religious observance— proper forms of dress and behavior—with her ability to discuss the Hebrew Bible with her children. By associating her role with two aspects of religious practice in this way, Aguilar reinforces Rachel's position as a woman capable of disseminating religious education

and expressing devotion to her children while at the same time continuing to foster the importance of domestic familial ties, moral codes, and value systems. For Rachel "was no great scholar" (28); she was not "unusually gifted" but she had the "strength of wisdom that she needed" to convey the spirit of Judaism to her children and "to every mother in Israel these powers are given" (28). Particularly striking about the scene is Rachel's extensive explication of Psalm 37: "Commit your ways unto the Lord; trust also in him, and he will bring it to pass" (29).[37] As Rachel guides her family through an understanding of the passage, they attempt to decipher its meaning. "*Ways* . . . was the word which first puzzled us" says Ruth. "It seems to me," Sarah says, "that the word *ways* has many meanings. In the verse 'Show me the ways, O Lord,' I think it means

Figure 3: "Ushering in the Jewish Sabbath," drawn by Isaac Snowman for the *London News*, April 9, 1898.

actions. In another verse, 'The Lord made known his ways unto Moses . . .' I think ways means *thoughts*.' 'But Ruth and I want to know which of these ways are we to regard it in our verse,' persisted Joseph. 'As meaning both outward actions and inward thought, my dear children,' replied his mother" (29). "Outward actions" and "inward thought" are the foundation of Anglo-Judaism as Aguilar models it; Jews can "secure" themselves "[f]rom *human* observation" (29), Rachel explains, "He knows all our struggles, far better than our dearest earthly friends, and His loving mercy towards us is infinitely stronger. Therefore, we can better commit our secret thoughts and feelings unto His keeping, than to that of our nearest friends on earth" (30). With this scene Aguilar shows Jewish women that they need not be "learned in the law" like a Jewish man (as Franklin and Leeser insisted) to convey fundamental spirit and moral codes of Jewish faith. Overtly in her non-fiction works like the *Spirit of Judaism*, Aguilar maintains that such codes are essential to developing Jews' ability to interact as Jews with a Christian culture. Rachel's insistence on ritual observance, her desire to impress the importance of Jewish faith and thus the spirit of Judaism on her children does, as the story will of course reveal, aid them in their future trials. In their interactions with prejudice and conversionists, Rachel's children realize that garnering strength from their heritage and their faith, their "trust in him" "will bring [their hardships] to pass."

With the conclusion of her Sabbath discussion Rachel explains passionately that "The Jew must have faith, not only in the existence of God, but in the sacred

history our God inspired, or he is no Jew. He must feel faith—believe God hears and will answer, or his prayers, however fervent, are of no avail. Without faith, his very existence must be an enigma, and his whole life misery" (31). This message belongs to both Rachel Perez and to Grace Aguilar. Aguilar's literature and social commentary pushes toward a new interpretation of the integration of Jews unlike anything that had been attempted before: she seeks both a recognition and acceptance of Judaism not only in English society, but in all societies in the hope that Jews will be able to maintain the dignity and sanctity of religious practice within the home. Jews must have faith and Aguilar seeks to invent the means by which maintaining that faith can go unscathed.

We see Aguilar's new Anglo-Judaism most vividly displayed in Sarah Levison, the young niece the Perez family adopts as their own after her mother's death and in attempt to protect her from her wayward father. Upon learning of her father's illness, Sarah feels it is her duty to return to London and care for him. She must "honor thy father," and even

> though her heart did feel desolate, she knew she was not forsaken. Her God was with her still, and He would in His own good time bring peace. She was obeying His call, by discharging her duty, and He would lead her through her dreary path. "Fear not, Abraham, I am thy shield and exceeding great reward," were the words in her little Bible, on which her eyes had that morning glanced, dim with tears. . . . Like Abraham, she was leaving home and friends, to dwell in what was to her a strange land, and the same God who had been with him, the God of Abraham and Israel, was her God also. (44)

Aguilar continues to impress the important relationship between identity and home. For though Sarah has become physically homeless, she nevertheless finds strength within her Jewish faith. Sarah takes solace in the knowledge that the same God who sheltered Abraham, watched over him on his journey to a new land, is there to do the same for her, thus enabling her to embrace the difficulty of leaving the only loving family and true home she has ever known. As the wife of Abraham, the biblical Sarah was not only protected by "the same God," but she was also a spiritual guide and a symbol of female strength for Jews. As God says to Abraham in Genesis 17:16, Sarah "shall give rise to nations."[38] It no coincidence then, that Sarah Levison embodies Aguilar's model for Anglo-Jewry as she leaves Rachel's home, Bible in hand and secure in her Jewish faith. Sarah openly identifies as a Jew—something Marie Morales could not have done—and is emblematic of Aguilar's desire to "give rise" to an Anglo-Jewish nation that does not hide their Judaism out of secrecy and fear. Sarah's difficulty in finding work once she arrives in London, however, reinforces Aguilar's contention that England is still a prejudiced nation and generally unwilling to integrate Jews; realizing her vision will be difficult:

> [Sarah] encountered only disappointment. . . . Again and again the fact of her being a Jewess completed the conference at once. One said, Jewish servants were more plague than enough, they should never enter her house. Another, that their pride and ignorance were beyond all bounds, and . . . a willingness to be taught or guided . . . was not in their nature. Another, that . . . they knew the low habits, the laziness and insolence that characterized such kind of people, and they certainly would not expose themselves to it. . . . Some stared at here with stupid surprise. . . . Others would not even hear her. . . . [Employers] want[ed] nothing to do with a Jewess. (52-53, 57)

Sarah must contend with the very real prejudice of a society unwilling to accept Jews. Llike Marie Morales, who rises in the face of persecution, "Sarah was not a weak, wavering child of impulse; her principles were steady, her faith was fixed, and the inward petition arose, with a fervour and faith which gave it power to penetrate the skies" (48). Through her grounding in Jewish faith—"Commit your ways unto the Lord; trust also in him, and he will bring it to pass" (29)—Sarah overcomes this adversity, secures work as a governess and integrates with English (Christian) society as a Jew. Sarah's employer cannot understand why "there were not more Jewish servants" (60) after hiring her. The scene suggests that when the Christian fear of "the Jew" is penetrated and "the Jew" given a chance, the prejudiced and exaggerated stereotypes so widely perpetuated are rendered false. Like Marie and Rachel before her, Sarah surmounts these difficulties because she has the power of her faith and heritage to guide her: "I thought I was grateful, felt it to the full before; but not till I was tried, not till I learned the value of strong principles, steady conduct, and firm control, did I know all [Rachel] had done for me. My God, indeed, was with me throughout; but that would not have been, had not [Rachel's] care and . . . affection taught me how to seek and love Him" (88). Sarah's acknowledgment of the importance of Rachel's role in the foundation of her moral and religious education reinforces the priority with which Aguilar insists Jewish women and mothers "take the lead in governing herself, her children, and by extension, society at large" (Mellor 91). As *The Perez Family* reveals, "women, mothers, and homes" were indeed having

an impact socially and Aguilar augments this point by infusing her fictional Rachel and Sarah with the strength and devotion of their biblical predecessors. Sarah's determination to be guided by Rachel's Sabbath teachings, to persevere in her Judaism when conversion and assimilation would have proved easier, not only reinforces the power of Jewish devotion and the biblical passage discussed above, but shows how Rachel's commitment to her family's spiritual education could have "an enormous—and hitherto largely uncredited—impact on the formation of public opinion" (Mellor 11). Sarah's Christian employer, after all, now respects her as a capable governess, rather than rejects her as "a Jew."

Reuben Perez, Rachel's oldest son, exemplifies the struggles Anglo-Jews faced regarding the constant temptation to convert or entirely assimilate at the expense of their Jewish identity: "'What is it to be a Jew,' they heard [Reuben] once say to a companion, 'but to be cut off from every honourable and manly employment? To be bound, fettered to an obsolete belief, which does but cramp our energies, and bind us to detestable trade. No wonder we are looked upon with contempt, believed to be bowed, crushed to the very earth, as void of all spirit or energy, only because we have no opportunity of showing them'" (6). Reuben internalizes the surrounding Christian culture's definition of Jews and Jewish history. Rather than persevere when faced with prejudice and rejection like Sarah, Reuben instead longs for social acceptance at the expense of his Judaism: "he was in truth only *nominally* a Jew . . . he cared not to sacrifice the Sabbath, and . . . no part of his religion was

permitted to interfere with his employments" (21). Having rejected Judaism, Reuben eventually relinquishes all ties to his faith when he marries a "stranger," a Christian, and even attends church on occasion. As Aguilar vividly depicts over the course of the narrative, however, Reuben feels lost without a religious identity and thus miserable because he does not wholly associate as either Jew or Christian.

In addition, Rachel's strength and commitment to her children as a Jewish mother is tested by Reuben's "total indifference to the religion of his forefathers" (5). Aguilar's depiction of the child who questions "what is it to be a Jew?" (6), as Reuben does, speaks to the larger problems of assimilation and religiosity Jews struggled against in nineteenth century England, as well as how the Jewish community, more specifically the Jewish family, copes with that abandonment. When Reuben interrupts the Sabbath celebration with news he plans to marry a Christian girl, Rachel's "mother's heart indeed felt breaking" (39). However, Rachel embraces her son and assures him that if his wife "not scorn [his] poor Jewish mother; she will meet but love from me and mine" (38). Not unlike Marie's Uncle Julian who embraces the Christian Arthur Stanley at the end of *The Vale of Cedars*, Rachel Perez continues Aguilar's message of inclusion and acceptance for the nineteenth century reader. The narrator explains that Rachel "had long learned that the spirit guiding the blessed religion . . . was too often misunderstood by many of her co-religionists; the idea of love bringing back a wanderer was, by the many, thought too perfectly ridiculous ever to be counted upon. But her conscience was at

rest" (40). In this scene Aguilar not only reinforces Jews' loving and accepting nature, but she also uses the philo-Semitic "conversionist myth of the Jews"[39] against itself. That is, Rachel does not reject her son, label him an apostate, or banish him from the family like we see in Bristow's *Emma de Lissau*: "Why did she not threaten to cast him off, if he persisted in this sinful connection. . . . Why had she not commanded him, on peril of a parent's curse, to break off the intended match? Then she would have done her duty" (39). Not only does Rachel continue loving Reuben, but she accepts his Christian wife in much the same way that philo-Semites "accepted" Jews—with the hope that doing so would aid in their coming "home" to Christianity through conversion. For Aguilar, and of course for Rachel, "home" is Judaism, and she subversively invokes philo-Semitic methodology—conversion through "love" and "acceptance" rather than violence and ostracism—in her attempt to insure that Reuben will find his way back to his Jewish home. Much like her authorial insertions in *Vale*, Aguilar steps into the narrative to explain:

> We are quite aware that, by far the greater number of our readers, widow Perez will be either violently condemned or contemptuously scorned as a weak, mean-spirited, foolish woman. We can only say that if so, we are sorry so few have the power of understanding her, and that the loving piety, the spiritual religion of her character should find so faint an echo in the Jewish heart. . . . We would only ask, with all humility, our readers of every class and grade, to recall any one single instance in which parental violence and severity, even coupled with malediction, have ever succeeded in bringing back a wanderer to his fold; if so, we will grant that our idea of love and forbearance effecting more than hate and violence is both dangerous and false. (40)

As Aguilar makes clear for her heroine, and as she hopes to instill in her readers whose sons and daughters grapple with the "temptations" of conversion, Rachel does not ostracize Reuben from the family unit and is determined to nurture him with "love" and acceptance in the confident hope that he will find his way "home." Again invoking her double-narrative voice, Aguilar addresses her Jewish readers overtly by arguing that parents not ostracize their children should they follow in Reuben's path; for philo-Semitic pressures are most successful when Jews not only question their faith, but when they are outright rejected by their families as a result of that questioning. Speaking to the conversionists, Reuben's process of self-discovery and his mother's continued love suggests that though philo-Semitic ideology might try to destroy the familial bond and weaken Jewish ties, the mission will not succeed. Rather, as we see in Rachel's actions, the subversive methodology can instead strengthen Jewish ties. Turning conversionist philo-Semitism on its head, using the methodology against itself, Aguilar illustrates an essential point in her vision for Anglo-Judaism: Jews must educate, embrace and love their children, even when they "reject their father's God" through either conversion or assimilation; for they will find their way back "home" as Reuben eventually does.

To be sure, Aguilar makes clear that Reuben is emotionally and spiritually homeless as an apostate Jew. However, with the birth of his daughter[40] Reuben comes to realize that by uniting himself "with a stranger race," (76) he ceased to be a Jew: "My God did not forsake me, even when I forsook him . . . . I have already

read and felt enough to glory in the faith I once despised—to feel it is a privilege, aye, and a proud one, to be a Jew" (66). Though Aguilar clearly rejects Reuben's type of assimilation, she does not reject Reuben himself. His inability to prosper and gain any kind of inward peace until he returns to Judaism champions Sarah's attempt to integrate as a Jew over Reuben's rejection and thus loss of Jewish identity. Once he figures out "what [he] believes and why" (*The Jewish Faith* 11)—the foundation of which was out in place in his youth by his mother—Reuben returns to the family unit because Rachel never rejected him. Through his own process of self-discovery, aided by his mother's love, Reuben, even though he may have wavered, nevertheless finds his way "home."

In constructing her tales, Aguilar shifted ideological standards to create real sympathy for Jews and Judaism. As a less threatening mode of disseminating her religious and moral messages found in her earlier works like the *Spirit of Judaism*, the historical romance and domestic exemplar tales Aguilar published reached Christian readers who would not otherwise pick up her overtly Jewish texts. Her estimation of women's roles in these contexts play a fundamental part in her larger vision for British Jewry, but, in the end "Grace Aguilar's championship of her own people," explains Anna Maria Hall in 1851, "distinguishes her from all other female authors of our time; and when writing of the 'fold of Judah,' there is a tone of feeling in all she has published which elevates and sustains her in a remarkable manner" (458). As Isaacs reminds readers with the conclusion of *The Young Champion*, one of Aguilar's

achievements was that "[s]he wrote books with a purpose, and that purpose was to champion Judaism and the Jew, our faith and religion, our history and mission" (186). This "purpose" underlies even Aguilar's more secular stories. While adding another facet to her role as a female author in early-nineteenth century England, this underlying motivation not only distinguishes Aguilar from other female writers of the day (both Christians and Jews) but also complicates her for the scholar trying to penetrate and decipher her role, and thus her importance, to both literature and Jewish culture and history.

In an 1847 meeting at Exeter Hall, the Bishop of Oxford declared "the Jews have no literature."[41] This was a charge Aguilar had herself made several years earlier; recall her plea in *The Jewish Faith*: "We want Jewish writers, Jewish books. . . . There is none now and the fault is our own. . . . [I]t is not enough to make the *Jew* respected, but to have JUDAISM rightly reverenced: and to do this, there must be a JEWISH LITERATURE, or the Jewish people will not advance one step" (264-265).[42] As *The Vale of Cedars* and *The Perez Family* reveal, Aguilar was one of the first writers in English to begin to fill this void and her novels, written years before the Bishop's claim, were among the first to redefine Jewish (as well as Christian) definitions of Jews, their histories, and their identities. Though she was cautious to share her innermost private reflections, Aguilar nevertheless "fulfills her own commandment for a 'Jewish literature.'" A literature that "counter[s] the hegemony of anti-Judaic

and anti-Semitic representations, and likewise reclaim[s] the discourse of spirituality from a wholly Christian association" (Scheinberg 173).

Aguilar wanted to improve the Jewish "public image" as Cheyette suggests, but her motivation to do so did not result from her desire to meet anyone's standards—Jew or Gentile—but her own. Rather, Aguilar's determination to secure a home for British Jews was, in her estimation, necessarily based in removing the stigma of negative Jewish stereotypes, countering conversionist and philo-Semitic efforts and strengthening Jews' identity as Jews. Aguilar's professed idealism aided in this reconstruction—for Jews themselves and the surrounding society—because it assisted in raising them up from the ranks of centuries of degradation. As Annette Goodman reflects in her brief 1930 "Note" for the *Jewish Chronicle Supplement*: "Grace Aguilar was the first English Jewess bold enough to rouse her fellow Jewesses from the lethargy into which they had fallen, to remind them of their people, of their faith. . . . Perhaps if her works are more widely read they will inspire some other Jew[s] . . . to rise from the ranks" (viii).

There is perhaps no more powerful evidence of Aguilar's impact in this regard than the voices of those Jews who read her. In June 1847, the American "Misses Levison and Isaacs, accompanied by some other admirers" wrote to Aguilar in "respect" and "In appreciation of her pious and able Productions in the Cause of Religion and Virtue." Their "testimonial" is representative of the way many readers, Jews and Christians alike, received and internalized Aguilar's works; the letter also

confirms the realization of Aguilar's hope that her "one talent" do some "little good" in the cause of "humanity." Indeed, Aguilar, with pen in hand, was able to do much more than that for her Jewish community:

> . . . . Until you arose, it has, in modern times, never been the case that a Woman of Israel should stand forth *the public advocate of the faith of Israel . . . [you] call on [your] own to cherish, on others to respect, the truth as it is in Israel.*
>
> You, dearest Sister, have done this, and more. *You have taught us to know and to appreciate our own dignity. . . . You have vindicated our social and spiritual equality with our brethren in faith. . . . your writings have led [us] to think . . . your writings reclaim . . . your writings guide and conduct . . . the strength which sustaineth, hope which faileth not*—God's holy law and word.
>
> Sister! You wrote not for fame, nor to obtain the admiration and thanks of mankind, yet they are yours. Your task was less to delight than to instruct, yet you do both. Alike heart and mind treasure your words and assent to your teaching. . . . continue what you have so well begun. . . . persevere as the instructress, the friend, the champion. . . . (emphasis mine)
>
> June 14, 1847. Sivan 30, 5607[43]

When the Jewish Publication Society of America re-released some of her historical fiction almost fifty years later in a 1902 collection titled *The Vale of Cedars and Other Tales*, one reviewer expressed "fear[s]" that:

> Few persons . . . [were now] acquainted with the writings of that remarkable Jewess, Grace Aguilar. But fifty years ago her novels and short stories were favorites in most households in England, the land of her birth. It is refreshing that she is not forgotten. . . . Her work was characterized by vast enthusiasm for her own race, strong powers of plot and description, and the present volume will be read with as deep an interest, at least as if Grace Aguilar were a living author. The book deserves this.[44]

Though the last decade has seen renewed critical interest in both Grace Aguilar's fiction and her role as a Jewish woman writer in early Victorian England, I am not convinced that scholars have read her with as deep an interest as she deserves. With the exception of Michael Galchinsky, and works by Cynthia Scheinberg, Elizabeth

Fay, and Michael Raugssis, modern critics have not given Aguilar her due. Aguilar was certainly not the only Jewish woman writing on behalf of Jews in early Victorian England;[45] she did not "emerge in a vacuum," as Galchinsky observes. However, she was the best known, most effective, and "remains pre-eminent" (*Selected Writings* 36). Roughly 150 years after the publication of her last works, more than "few persons" are "acquainted with the writings of that remarkable Jewess, Grace Aguilar." If this project raises Aguilar from "the ranks" as she hoped to do for Jews, then I, perhaps, will have done some "little good."

Notes

1. Letter to Miriam Moses Cohen, 24 October 1847; and, Letter to Miriam Moses Cohen, 8 November 1847. Galchinsky, private transcription.

2. Review. *Graham's American Monthly Magazine of Literature, Art, and Fashion* 38 (May 1851): 405.

3. See Zatlin, *The Nineteenth-Century Anglo-Jewish Novel*; and Lask-Abrahams, "Grace Aguilar: A Centenary Tribute."

4. See *Lectures on the Conversion of the Jews*. New York: The American Society for the Melioration of the Condition of the Jews, 1846. 13.

5. "It is quite refreshing, after the floods of impassioned sensational novels that have poured from the press on all sides for the last ten or fifteen years, to know that there is a call for the purity and high-toned sentiment that flow from the pen of Miss Aguilar. . . . [T]hough her children and grown people are sometimes stiff and priggish, and are wont to talk like books, they are always well-bred and refined, never descending to irreverence or slang, as they too often do in stories of to-day. It was formerly a criticism on her works, that they favored Judaism (the creed of the author) at the expense of Christianity; but no such charge can be brought against *Home Influence* with any truth. . . . [I]f the works of this author take again with the novel-reading public, it will be a symptom of returning health to the community." *Catholic World* 11 (1870): 432).

6. Letter to Miriam Moses Cohen, 16 January 1847. Galchinsky, private transcription.

7. In an 1844 letter to Cohen Aguilar writes that she "felt from the age of 18" the need for expressing herself in this manner and "satisfied" herself "by writing prayers." See "Correspondence." 98.

8.Galchinsky, private transcription, letter from Rebecca Gratz to Miriam Moses Cohen, 3 June 1845.

9. In a February 1852 letter to Solomon Cohen Sarah Aguilar writes that she has "determined to send . . . the Prayers &c of [her] Angel Child.—I have read them many times over and have taken the opinion of a Friend who was intimate with and truly loved by my sweet Grace. She agreed with me that some of those I had copied had better be with-drawn, which I have done and which will account for the numbering of the pages being in many places altered. . . . Give my kind love to Mrs. Cohen and ask her to read them all through and if she thinks there are any that had better <u>not</u> be published, to take them away, beg her to act as if they were her own daughter's writings." Galchinsky, private transcriptions.

10. See *Tanakh*:

Isaiah 53:2-4
"He had no form or beauty, that we should look at him:
No charm, that we should find him pleasing.
He was despised, shunned by men,
A man of suffering, familiar with disease.
As one who hid his face from us,
He was despised, we held him of no account."

Psalm 22:7-8
"But I am a worm, less than human;
scorned by men, despised by people.
All who see me mock me;
they curl their lips,
they shake their heads."

11. Psalm 22:7

12.Ibid, verse 14

13. Ibid, verse 17

14. Ibid, verse 18-19

15. Ibid, verse 21

16. Ibid, verse 22

17. Smith also notes that Isaiah 42 and Jeremiah 31 were often used as well. See *Tanakh*:

> Isaiah 42: 7
> Opening eyes deprived of light;
> Rescuing prisoners from confinement,
> From the dungeon those who sit in the darkness.
>
> Jeremiah 31:31-33
> See, a time is coming—declares the LORD—when I will make a new covenant with the House of Israel and the House of Judah. It will not be like the covenant I made with their fathers, when I took then by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, a covenant which they broke, so that I rejected them—declares the LORD. But such is the covenant I will make with the House of Israel after these days—declares the LORD: I will put My Teaching in to the inmost being and inscribe it upon their hearts. Then I will be their God, and they shall be My people.
>
> Psalm 22:9
> Let him commit himself to the LORD;
> let Him rescue him,
> let Him save him.

18. Another speaker proposes "to show that the Jewish Scriptures contain a great variety of intelligible and minute references to the Messiah; references so frequent, that we may justly say that the Old Testament is thoroughly pervaded with them, and so clearly unfolding the character of Christ, and the nature of his salvation and his kingdom, as to leave inexcusable those who reject the claims of Jesus of Nazareth, while they profess to take these ancient writings as the rule and reason of their faith." See *A Course of Lectures on the Jews: Ministers of the Established Church in Glasgow*. Ed. Gerald Grob et al. New York: Arno P, 1977.

19. Ibid, 250

20. Review. *Spirit of Judaism. The Christian Lady's Magazine*. (n.a.), September 1843. The review is included at the end of the 1864 John Mortimer edition of the *Records of Israel*.

21. Review. *Spirit of Judaism*. By a Christian. *The United States' Gazette* (n.d.). Ibid.

22. *Women of Israel*. Review. *Southern Literary Messenger* 17 (1851): 188-189.

23. 47 (Jul 1853): 87.

24. Review—No Title. *Graham's American Monthly Magazine of Literature, Art, and Fashion*. 38 (May 1851): 405.

25. Hone, William. *The Every-Day Book*. Tegg's edition. 2 vols. (n.d.) I:152-153 (entry for February 23). Quoted in Felsenstein 254.

26. Review. *Spirit of Judaism*. Trans. from the German, from a *Magdeburg Paper*, 11 August 1843 (n.a.). The review is included at the end of the 1864 John Mortimer edition of the *Records of Israel*.

27. While Galchinsky locates the beginning of the English variant of the German *Haskalah* during the early nineteenth century, David Ruderman suggests it begins much earlier in the mid-late eighteenth century. For a complete discussion of the distinctions between the German and English experiences of *Haskalah*, see Ruderman's *Jewish Enlightenment in an English Key*, 10-20.

28. There were certainly exceptions like the Rothchild and Goldsmid families. See Israel Finestein's *Jewish Society in Victorian England*.

29. See chapter 3, note 23. Also see Galchinsky, "Permanently Blacked."

30. Henry Colburn also published Benjamin D'israeli, Mary Shelley, and Bulwer Lytton among others.

31. Lask discusses this proposal in "Grace Aguilar: a Centenary Tribute." There is no first-hand account of Colburn's offer; Lask cites Mrs. Crossland's (also known more popularly as Camila Toulmin) recounting of her conversation with Aguilar regarding this matter in *Landmarks of a Literary Life*. See pg 144.

32. Galchinsky, private transcription of Aguilar's Letter to Robert Chambers, 30 June 1846.

33. See *Origins*, 34.

34. For an extensive discussion of the novella in this regard see Galchinsky's *Origins of the Modern Jewish Woman Writer* (179-185). Also see my discussion in chapter one concerning the influence of Enlightenment feminist subversion tactics in Aguilar's domestic fiction.

35. http://dictionary.oed.com/, home. May 5, 2004.

36. Hazlitt, "Emancipation of the Jews," 321.

37. Psalm 37:5

38. Genesis 17:11, *Tanakh* 24.

39. See my discussion of the myth in chapter 2, 62.

40. Reuben admits: "I thought a union with a Christian would put a final barrier between me and the race I had taught myself to hate—would mark me no more a Jew. . . . I tried to believe with my Jeanie and her father, but I could not" (63-64). Shortly after Reuben's daughter is born his wife falls ill. On her death bed she requests that the child be baptized. Reuben, however, could "not make this promise" (65). Instead, he vows to "study both faiths" (65). The narrator explains that "A year was the period of time Reuben had promised to devote to the fulfillment of his vow; and if, at the end of that time he could believe in Jesus, he and his child would, of course, be made Christians, but if his studies had a contrary effect, no more . . . would be said to him on the subject" (66).

41. Recounted in "Have the Jews Any Literature." *The Jewish Chronicle* 6 (1850): 169-171.

42. There is some confusion regarding the actual writing and publication dates of *The Jewish Faith*. Michael Galchinsky's timeline indicates that Aguilar published the text in 1846 while Aguilar's own correspondence with the Cohens references her working on it at this time and then cites it as a published text in 1847. Her great nephew (thrice removed) Michael Dugdale (the son of Emmanuel Aguilar, the eldest of her two younger brothers) suggests in his timeline <www.graceaguilar.info> that Grace had been working on *The Jewish Faith* as early as 1842 and sought publication as early as 1845.

43. Quoted in Galchinsky, *Selected Writings*, 355; "Testimonial from the Misses Levison and Isaacs, Accompanied by Some Other Admirers, 14 June 1847."

44. Review. *The Vale of Cedars*. *Current Literature* 34 (1903): 625.

45. Others included Celia and Marion Moss, Emma Lyons, Maria Polack, Judith and Charolette Montefiore, and Anna Maria Goldsmid who differed from Aguilar in a number of ways: "they were more assimilationist or more separatist; they were more reform-minded or more traditionalist; they were Ashkenazic rather than Sephardic; or they were upper rather than middle class" (37). See Galchinsky, *Selected Writings*.

CONCLUSION
ISRAEL DEFENDED

> A few years ago a friend set out one day to photograph the tomb. When he reached the spot, he found the inscription to be too illegible for such a purpose. Although the words can no longer be read as of old, the name, the character, the work of Grace Aguilar will resist decay for ages, and they cannot be blotted out by storm or rain, or time's biting ravages. They are immortal, like the faith of Israel, which from her early girlhood she championed so resolutely and unfalteringly.
>
> —Abram S. Isaacs, (1913)

On a rainy afternoon in February, 2005, I was in the Rare Books and Special Collections library at the University of Florida waiting on a request: Grace Aguilar's translation of Isaac de Orbio Castro's *Israel Defended*—though never published, the book was privately printed in 1838.[1] Three years had passed since I had haphazardly picked Aguilar's name from a long list on my "British Romanticism and Judaism" syllabus for my class presentation in January, 2002. "*Israel Defended*?" the librarian asked as he wiped the dust from the rare little volume before handing it to me. Several pages were stuck together, brittle and yellowed with age. Afraid that I might damage the delicate book, I asked him for help. He peered over the rim of his glasses to examine the pages, took out a razor blade and sliced them apart. I winced. "No matter how valuable," he said, "in the end it's only a book." "Only a book?," I thought to myself. Indeed. "A book" not only has the ability to reflect society, but it has the power to influence and to shape a nation and its people. Motivated by the

struggles of the Jewish people, Aguilar, aware of that power, used literature in her continuing quest for a Jewish home in England. She was determined that her talent as a writer "do some little good" and have purpose: "It is the ardent hope," she writes in the Preface to *Israel Defended*, that the author's "labours . . . should prove successful, by rendering more clear the rudiments of the Jewish Faith to the youthful mind—confirm the wavering—or bid the thoughtless think—her highest ambition will indeed be fulfilled" (vi-vii).

Aguilar's was "a great purpose," observes Anna Maria Hall in her *Pilgrimage*, "persevered in with stoic resolution, until, supported by pillows, and shaken by intense suffering, [her] trembling fingers could no longer hold the pen" (454). "Writing" the wrongs played out on a persecuted people—contemporaries and ancestors alike—Aguilar is an author whose fiction both penetrated the anti-Judaism her own nineteenth century culture and further provides twenty-first century scholars with a model for reading other fiction by and about Jews. For though "the purity and high-toned sentiment that flow from the pen of Miss Aguilar. . . was formerly a criticism on her works, [or] that they favored Judaism (the creed of their author) at the expense of Christianity," as an 1870 reviewer wrote for the *Catholic World*, "no such charge can be brought . . . with any truth. . . . [I]f the works of this author take again with the novel-reading public, it will be a symptom of returning health in the community."[2]

Notes

1. I am indebted to Robert Singerman, the curator of the Judaica Library at the University of Florida, for acquiring *Israel Defended* specifically for my research. He is not the special collections librarian I reference below.

2. 11 (1870): 432.

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

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I certify that I have read this study and that in my opinion it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a dissertation for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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This dissertation was submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the Department of English in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences and to the Graduate School and was accepted as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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